PDC 563/0.9

THE MAGAZINE O

Fantasy AND Science Fiction

APRIL 75c • UK 30p.

ISAAC ASIMOV
The Cinderella Compound

GREGORY BENFORD
JOSEPH GREEN
ROBERT F. YOUNG
GEO. ALEC EFFINGER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sex and science fiction

Sexuality, once the forbidden land of science fiction, is explored in a provocative and diversified collection of stories and novelettes by Reginald Bretnor, Robert Silverberg, George Zebrowski, Brian W. Aldiss, Anthony Boucher, Theodore Sturgeon, Miriam Allen DeFord, and twelve other famous authors.

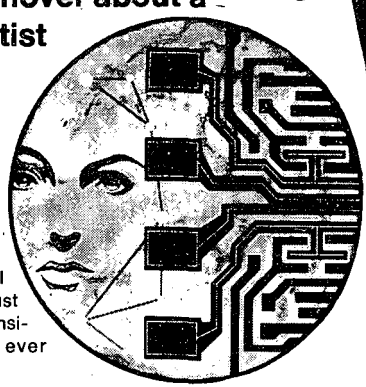
STRANGE BED FELLOWS

Edited by THOMAS N. SCORTIA

$5.95, now at your bookstore

RANDOM HOUSE

A fantastic—yet chillingly convincing—novel about a modern scientist who finds that astrology is no myth



He learns that the stars really *do* control individual destinies . . . that with the aid of a computer, he can predict what any person will become...and that he now must cope with an agonizing responsibility no man in history has ever had before.

THE ASTROLOGER

A novel by JOHN CAMERON

$5.95, now at your bookstore RANDOM HOUSE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantasy and Science Fiction

Including Venture Science Fiction

APRIL • 24th YEAR OF PUBLICATION

NOVELETS

Icarus Descending	GREGORY BENFORD	5
Psimed	C. S. CLAREMONT	39
The City on the Sand	GEO. ALEC EFFINGER	138

SHORT STORIES

The Alarming Letters From Scottsdale	WARNER LAW	22
Arclight	DAVID DRAKE	64
Too Many Goblins	WILLIAM LEE	83
Robustus Revisited	JOSEPH GREEN	96
Remnants of Things Past	ROBERT F. YOUNG	112

FEATURES

Books	AVRAM DAVIDSON	33
Films	BAIRD SEARLES	80
Science: The Cinderella Compound	ISAAC ASIMOV	126
Cartoon	GAHAN WILSON	137
F&SF Competition		158

Cover by Don Davis for "Icarus Descending"

Edward L. Ferman, EDITOR & PUBLISHER Isaac Asimov, SCIENCE EDITOR
Andrew Porter, ASSISTANT EDITOR Dale Beardsle, CIRCULATION MANAGER
Joseph W. Ferman, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NO: 51-25682

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 44, No. 4, Whole No. 263, Apr. 1973. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc., at 75¢ per copy Annual subscription $8.50; $9.00 in Canada and Mexico, $9.50 in other foreign countries. Postmaster: send form 3579 to Fantasy and Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Editorial submissions should be sent to 347 East 53rd St., New York, N.Y. 10022. Second class postage paid at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 1973 by Mercury Press, Inc. All rights, including translations into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Greg Benford's first F&SF story since "Deeper than the Darkness" (April 1969) is a solid and suspenseful account of a NASA mission to Icarus, which is not a planet, but a mile-across flying mountain that is on a collision course with Earth.

Icarus Descending

by GREGORY BENFORD

HE FOUND THE FLYING mountain by its shadow. Ahead, the sun was dimmed by a swirling film of dust, and Jason first saw Icarus at the tip of a faint finger of shadow in the clouds.

"The core is here," he said over the radio. "It's solid."

"You're sure?" Len replied. His voice, filtered by the dust and radio noise, was thin and distant, though the *Dragon* module was only a few hundred kilometers away.

"Something's casting a shadow through the dust and coma."

"Let me talk to Houston. Back in a sec."

A humming blunted the silence. Jason's mouth felt soft, full of cotton: the old feeling of mingled fear and excitement. He nudged his module toward the cone of shadow that pointed directly ahead, sunward, and adjusted altitude control. A pebble rattled against the aftersection. In a moment the sun flickered and then paled as the growing dot passed across its face. Corona streamed and shimmered around a hard nugget of black: Icarus. He was the first man to see the asteroid in over two years. From Earth its newborn cloak of thick dust and gas hid this solid center.

"Jason," Len said quickly, "how fast are you closing?"

"Hard to say." The nugget had grown to the size of a nickel. "I'm moving to the side, out of the shadow, just in case it comes up too fast." Two stones rapped hollowly on the hull; the dust seemed thicker

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

here, random fragments bled from Icarus to make the Flare Tail.

"Yeah, Houston just suggested that. Any magnetic field reading?"

"Not—wait, I've just picked up some. Maybe, oh, a tenth of a gauss."

"Uh-ho. I'd better tell them."

"Right." His stomach clenched slightly. *Here we go,* he thought.

The black coin grew; he slipped the module further away from the edge of the disk, for safety margin. A quick burst of the steering jets slowed him. He studied the irregular rim of Icarus through the small telescope, but the blazing white sun washed out any detail. He felt his heart thumping quickly in the closeness of his suit.

A click, some static. "This is Dave Fowles at Houston, Jason, patching through *Dragon*." Congratulations on your visual acquisition. We want to verify this magnetic field strength—can you transmit the automatic log?"

"Roger," Jason said, slipping automatically into jargon. He flipped switches; there was a sharp beep: "Done."

The edge of the disk rushed at him. "I'm going around it, Len. Might lose you for a while."

"Okay."

He swept over the sharp twilight line and into full sunlight. Below was a burnt cinder of a world. Small bumps and shallow valleys threw low shadows, and everywhere the rock was a brownish black. Its highly elliptical orbit had grilled Icarus as though on a spit, taking it yearly twice as close to the sun as Mercury.

Jason matched velocities with the mile-wide rock and activated a series of semiautomatic experiments. Panel lights winked, and a low rhythm of activity sounded through the cramped cabin. Icarus turned slowly in the arc-white sun, looking bleak and rough and not at all like the bearer of death to millions of people.

"Can you hear me, Jason?" Len said.

"Right."

"I'm out of your radio shadow now. What's she look like?"

"Stony, maybe some nickel-iron. No signs of snow or conglomerate structures."

"No wonder, it's been baked for billions of years."

"Then where did the cometary tail come from? Why the Flare?"

"An outcropping of ice got exposed, or maybe a vent opened to the surface—you know what they told us. Whatever the stuff was, maybe it's all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been evaporated off by now. Been two years, that should be enough."

"Looks like it's rotating—ummm, let me check—about every two hours."

"Uh-huh," Len said. "That cinches it."

"Anything less than solid rock couldn't support that much centrifugal force, right?"

"That's what they say. Maybe Icarus is the nucleus of a used-up comet and maybe not—it's rock, and that's all we care about right now."

Jason's mouth tasted bitter; he drank some water, sloshing it between his teeth. "It's just about a mile across, roughly spherical, not much surface detail," he said slowly. "No details of cratering, but there are some shallow circular depressions. I don't know, it could be the cycle of heating and cooling as it passes near the sun is an effective erosion mechanism."

He said all this automatically, trying to ignore the slight depression he felt. Jason had hoped Icarus would turn out to be an icy conglomerate instead of a rock, even though he knew the indirect evidence was heavily against it. Along with a few of the astrophysicists he hoped the Flare Tail of 1987—a bright orange coma twenty million miles long that twisted and danced and lit the night sky of Earth for three months—had signaled the end of Icarus. No telescope, including the orbiting Skylab IV tube, had been able to penetrate the cloud of dust and gas that billowed out. Dust obscured the spot where the asteroid Icarus had been. One school of thought held that a rocky shell had been eroded by the eternal fine spray of particles from the sun—the solar wind—and a remaining core of ice had suddenly boiled away, making the Flare Tail. Thus, no core remained. A majority of astronomers felt it unlikely that the ice should be at the center of Icarus; probably most of the rocky asteroid was left somewhere in the dust cloud.

NASA enjoyed the controversy and hoped it would stimulate funding for an Icarus flyby in the future. The curling fan-shaped coma was brighter than anything since Halley's Comet. People noticed it, even through city air pollution. It made news.

But in the winter of 1987, the question of Icarus' composition became more than a passing academic point. The bright jet of hot gas that spurted from the head of what was now the Icarus Comet seemed to have deflected it slightly. The dust cloud was moving sidewise slightly as it followed Icarus' old orbit, and it was natural to assume that if a core remained, it was somewhere near the center of the drifting cloud. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

deflection was slight. Precise measurements were difficult and some uncertainty remained. But it was clear that by late 1989 the center of the cloud and whatever remained of Icarus would collide with the Earth.

"Len, how's it look from your end?" Jason said.

"Pretty dull. Can't see much for the dust. The sun's a kind of watery color looking through the cloud. I'm off to the side pretty far, to separate your radio and radar image from the sun's."

"Where am I?"

"Right on the money, in the center of the dust. On your way to Bengal."

"Hope not."

"Yeah. Hey—getting a relay from Houston for you." A moment's humming silence as the black pitted world turned beneath him. Jason wondered whether it was made of the original ancient material that formed the solar system, as the astrophysicists said, or the center of a shattered planet, as the popular media trumpeted. He had hoped it would be a snowball of methane and water ice that would break up when it hit Earth's atmosphere—perhaps filling the sky with blue and orange jets of light and spreading an aurora around the globe, but doing no damage. He stared down at the cinder world that had betrayed his hopes by being so substantial, so deadly. The automatic cameras clicked methodically, mapping its random bumps and depressions; the cabin smelled of hot metal and the sour tang of sweat. No leisurely strolling and hole-boring expeditions with Len, now; no measurements; no samples to chip away; no time.

"Dave again, Jason. Those magnetic field strengths sew it up, boy—it's nickel-iron, probably 80 percent pure or better. From the dimensions, we calculate the rock masses around four thousand million tons."

"Right."

"Len's radar fixes have helped us narrow down the orbit, too. That ball of rock you're looking at is coming down in the middle of India, just like we thought. I—"

"You want us to go into the retail poultry business," Jason said.

"Yeah. Deliver the Egg."

Jason lit a panel of systems monitors. "Bringing the Egg out of powered-down operation," he said mechanically, watching the lights sequence.

"Good luck, boy," Len broke in. "Better look for a place to plant it. We've got plenty of time. Holler if you need help," he said, even though they both knew full well he could not bring the *Dragon* module into the cloud without temporarily losing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

most communications with Houston.

Jason passed an hour in the pleasant, time-filling tasks of awakening the fifty-megaton fusion device that rode a few yards behind his cabin. He repeated the jargon—redundancy checks, safe-arm mode, profile verification—without taking his attention fully from the charred expanse below. Toward the end of the time he caught sight of what he had anticipated: a jagged cleft at the dawn edge of Icarus.

"I think I've found the vent," he called. "About as long as a football field, as wide as twenty feet in places."

"Think it's a quake feature?" Len said.

"Could be. It will be interesting to see if there are more, and whether they form a pattern."

"How deep is it?"

"I can't tell yet; the bottom is in shadow now."

"If you have the time—wait, Houston wants to patch through to you again."

A pause, then: "We've been very happy with the relayed telemetery from you, Jason. Looks to us here in Control as though the Egg is ready to fly."

"Has to be hatched before it can fly."

"Right, boy, got me on that one. You know, I wish you could see the 3D coverage of the crowds around the installation here, Jason. Traffic is blocked for twenty miles; there are people everywhere. I think this has caught the imagination of all humanity, Jason, a noble attempt—"

He wondered if Dave knew how all this sounded. Well, he probably did; every astronaut a member of Actor's Equity. He shuddered when, a moment later, the other man described the sweaty press of bodies around NASA Houston, the heat strokes suffered and babies delivered in the waiting crowds. "Anybody you would like to talk to back here on Earth, Jason, while you're taking your break?" Dave said; and he replied that, no, there was no one, he wanted to keep watch on Icarus as it turned, study the vent—while simultaneously in his mind's eye he saw his parents in their cluttered apartment, wanted to speak to them, felt the halting, ineffectual way he had tried to explain to them why he was doing this thing. They still lived in a world where research and the space program were respected and had money. They knew he had trained for programs that never materialized, had missed the one-man Mars shot by a hair, but they could not understand why he should take a mission that promised nothing but the chance to plant a bomb if he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

succeeded, and death if he failed. They believed in science—his father was a retired chemistry professor from a small Illinois college, his mother a botanist—and saw no reason for him to risk his years of geology and astronautics in the high vacuum halfway between Venus and Earth.

But what had he told them? Nothing, really. Instead he had sat in their Boston rocker, pumping impatiently, and spoken of the Second Depression. Of the argument he remembered little, only the blurred cadences of their voices as they replied, the familiar tones he recalled from adolescence softened by years. The living room was layered with smells of olive oil and dust, things more substantial than his words. Here in their damp old house his jittery, crowded world faded away, and he, too, found it difficult to believe in the masses of people who jammed in the cities, fouling the world and blunting, spongelike, the best that anyone could do for them. There was little money for research, for new ideas, for dreams. But his parents did not feel it, had not lived through it. His father advised him to wait for something better; Jason would seize what he could. He had given them no grandchildren, no daughter-in-law, little time—he promised himself that after this was done perhaps he could see them more. They said it was not what he was trained for; they mentioned the unmanned backup missions ready with a series of gentler nuclear shoves; they knew he had been picked for his twenty-seven years and for his reflexes and finally because there weren't all that many trained men left. But he was going and they knew it and that last evening had ended in silence.

Dave Fowles' voice broke his concentration. "We have a recalculation of the impact damage, Jason. Looks pretty bad."

"Oh?"

"Two point six million people dead, peripheral damage for four hundred kilometers. No major Indian cities hit, but hundreds of villages—"

"How is that famine going?"

He sighed. "Worse than we expected. I guess as soon as word filtered down that Icarus might hit, all those dirt farmers left their crops and started preparing for the afterlife. That just aggravated the famine even worse. The UN thinks there'll be several million dead inside six months, even with our airlifts, and our sociometricians agree."

"And the movement out of the impact area?"

"Bad. They just give up and won't walk a step, Herb said. It must be their religion or some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing. I don't understand it, I really don't."

Jason thought, and something came to an edge in him.

"Dave, I have an idea."

"Sure, we just went off open channel, Jason; the networks aren't getting this. Shoot."

"I'm going to plant the Egg after this rest period, aren't I? This thing is solid metal ore, the magnetic field proves that. No point in waiting."

"Correct. The Mission Commander just gave me confirmation on that. We have you scheduled to begin descent in about thirteen minutes."

"Okay. This is it: I want to put the Egg in that vent I've found. It's a long, irregular fissure. The Egg will give us a better momentum transfer if it goes off in a hole, and this one looks pretty deep."

A whisper of static marked the time. Some tiny facet of Icarus gave him a quick white flash and vanished; he ached to seek it out, take a sample. He felt himself suspended beneath the white sun.

"How deep do you estimate?" Dave's voice was guarded.

"I've been watching the shadows move as the vent rotates into the sun. I think its floor must be forty meters down, at least. That'll give us a good kick from the Egg. I can take some interesting specimens out of there at the same time," he finished lamely.

"Let you know in a minute."

Len broke the wait that followed. "Think you can handle that? Securing that thing might get tricky if there's not enough room."

"If I can't get it down to the bottom, I'll just leave it hanging. The Egg won't weigh even a pound on the surface, I can just hang it to the fissure wall like a painting."

"Right. Hope they buy it," and then the carrier from Houston came in.

"We authorize touchdown near the edge. If the vent is wide enough—"

Jason was already readying his board.

It was a world of straight lines, no serene parabolas. He brought his module—cylindrical, thin radial spokes for stability, an insect profile ending in a globular pouch that was the Egg—in slowly, watching his radar screen. It was difficult to sense in this pebble of a world below him the potential to open a crater in the Earth twenty miles across. It seemed sluggish, inert.

"Sure you don't need any help?" Len called.

Jason smiled and his walnut-brown face crinkled. "You know Houston won't let us get

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out of contact. The *Dragon's* high gain antenna might not work in all this dust, and—"

"I know," Len said, "and if we were both on the sunward side of Icarus, Earth would be in my radio shadow. Fine. Just let me know if—"

"Sure."

The textured surface grew. He flew toward the dawn line and the small pocks and angles became clearer. Steering rockets murmured at his back. He concentrated on distances and relative velocities, and upon speeding up the automatic cameras, until he was hovering directly above the vent. He rotated the module to gain a better view and inched closer.

"It's deeper than I thought. I can see fifty meters in, and the mouth is quite wide."

"Sounds encouraging," Dave said.

Without waiting for further word he took the module down to the top of the vent. Blasted stone rose toward him, brown discolored into black where minute traces of gas had been baked away.

His headphones sputtered and crackled. "I'm losing your telemetery," Len's voice came.

Jason brought the module to a dead stop. "Look, Len, I can't go further in without the rock screening you out."

"We can't break contact."

"Well—"

"Maybe I should move in."

"No, stay outside the dust. Move sunward and behind me—there'll still be a cone of good reception."

"Okay, I'm off."

"Listen, you guys," David said, "if you're having trouble with this, maybe we should just for—" Jason switched him off. Minutes were being eaten away.

He rotated the module to get a full set of photographs. He seemed to be at the top of a bumpy round hill that sloped away wherever he looked. Burnished mounds and clefts made a miniature geography, seeming larger than they were as the eye tried to fit them into a familiar perspective. He glanced at the clock. It had been long enough; he flipped a switch and the burr of static returned.

"How's it going, Len?" he said.

"Hey, having transmission trouble? I lost you there for a minute."

"Had some thinking to do."

"Oh. Dave says they're having second thoughts back there."

"I guessed as much. But then, they're not here, are they?"

Len chuckled. "I guess not."

"How far around are you? Ready for me to go in?"

"Almost. Take a few more minutes. What's it like down there?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Pretty bleak. I wonder why Icarus is so close to spherical? I expected something jagged."

"Can't be gravitational forces."

"No, there's not enough to even hold down gravel—everything is bald, there's no debris around at all."

"Maybe solar erosion has rounded the whole asteroid off."

"I'm going in," Jason said abruptly.

"Okay, I guess I can track you from here."

The rotation of Icarus had brought the left wall closer. He brought the craft back to center, remembering the first time he had learned in some forgotten science text that the Earth rotated. For weeks he had been convinced that whenever he fell down it was because the Earth had moved beneath him without his noticing. He had thought it a wonderful fact, that everyone was able to stand up when the Earth was obviously trying to knock them down.

He smiled and took the craft in.

Jaws of stone yawned around him. Random fragments of something like mica glinted from the seared rocks. Jason stopped about halfway down and tilted his spotlights up to see the underhang of a shelf; it was rough, brownish. He glided toward the vent wall and extended a waldoe claw. Its teeth bit neatly with a dull snap and brought back a few pounds of desiccated rubble. Len called; Jason answered with monosyllables. He nudged the module downward again, moving carefully in the shadowed silence. He used a carrier pouch on the craft's skin to store the sample and added more claws full of rock to other pouches.

He was nearly to the bottom before he noticed it. The pitted floor was a jumble of rocks that rose from pools of ink. Jason could not make out detail; he turned his spotlights downward.

A deep crack ran down the center of the rough floor. It was perhaps five meters wide and utterly black. At irregular intervals things protruded from the crack, angular things that were charred and blunted. Some gave sparkling reflections, as though partially fused and melted.

Jason glided closer. One of the objects was a long convoluted band of a coppery metal that described an intricate, folded weave of spirals.

He sat in the stillness and looked at it. Time passed.

Ten meters away a crumpled form that had been square was jammed in the crack, as though it had been partly forced out by a great wind. There were others; he photographed them.

Len had been calling for some time. When he was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

through Jason pressed a button to transmit and said, "We're going to have to recalculate, Len. Icarus isn't a lump of ice or a rock or anything else. I think—" he paused, still not quite believing it. "It has to be a spaceship."

It took Houston an hour to agree that he had to leave the module. Both he and Len had to argue with a project director who thought they had wasted too much time already; the man obviously didn't believe anything they reported, thinking it a cock-and-bull story designed to give Jason more time for sample collecting. Len could only barely be restrained from coming into the cloud himself, and only the necessity for re-evaluating the mission stopped him.

Still, Houston demanded a price. The Egg had to be secured to the vent floor before anything else was done. This could be done without Jason's leaving the module, and rather than argue he moved quickly and efficiently to make short work of it. The Egg was a dull gray sphere with securing bolts sunk into its skin. Jason maneuvered it near the dark fissure wall and fired the bolts that freed it. The sphere coasted free. Before it could glide very far, he shot the aft securing bolts, and they arced across the space to the wall and buried themselves in the stone. Steel cables reeled in and pulled the Egg to the rock face. Nothing could move it now, and only Len or Jason could detonate its fifty megatons.

Jason ate before he left the module. Houston was divided about contingency plans; Dave gave him a summary to which he half listened. He and Len had an ample margin of air, and some changes could be made in their braking orbit back to Earth. The two unmanned backup missions were being stepped up, but they looked less promising now: they had to close on Icarus at high velocity, and the dust and pebbles inside the cloud could disable the warheads before they searched out Icarus itself.

"Popping the cover," Jason called and switched over to suit radio. The hatch came free with a hollow bang. He inched gingerly out, went hand over hand down the module's securing line, and stood at last on Icarus.

"The surface crunches a little under my feet," he said, knowing Len would pester him with questions if he didn't keep up a steady stream of commentary. They had both ridden in a small cabin for five weeks to intercept Icarus, and now Len was missing a payoff larger than anything they had dreamed. "It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

must be something like cinder. Dried out. That's the way it looks, anyway."

A pause. "I'm at the edge of the crack. It's about two meters across here, and the sides are pretty smooth. I'm hanging over it now, looking in. The walls go on for about four meters and then there's nothing but black. My lights don't pick up anything beyond that."

"Maybe there's a hole in there," Len said.

"Could be." Before Dave could break in, Jason added, "I'm going in," and caught a lip of rock to pull himself into the crack.

When the rock fell away from him, there was only a faint glimmering reflection ahead. A white rectangle loomed up as he coasted on. It seemed to be set into the side of some larger slab, flush against the rock on one end and at least a hundred meters on a side. There were odd-shaped openings in it, some with curlicues of metal standing beside them. Jason lost his bearings as he approached and had to spin his arms to bring his feet around. There was a faint ring as he landed.

The white material had the dull luster of metal. Jason used a cutting tool to gouge out a sliver. Nearby, a contorted thing of red and green appeared to grow smoothly out of the white metal with no seam. To Jason it looked like an abstract sculpture; when he touched it there was a clear humming, and an arm of it moved and then was still. Nothing more happened. He moved on, examined others of the objects, and then shined a light down one of the holes in the face. The hole was large, oval, and in the distance he could see where other dark corridors intersected it.

He went in.

Three hours later, when he had exhausted his film canisters and was beginning to tire, he headed back. The network of corridors was a simple but space-saving web of spherical shells, intricately detailed, and he had no difficulty finding his way out.

"I'm back in the cabin," he said.

"My God, where have you been, Jason? Hours without a peep—I was almost ready to come in after you."

"There was a lot to see."

"Houston's patched through—and mad as hell, too—so start talking."

He took them through it all, describing the small rooms with elaborate netting that might have been sleeping quarters, the places like auditoriums, the ceilings with dancing lights, all the similarities he could find. And the strangeness: spaces clogged

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with an infinitely layered green film that did not dissipate into the vacuum around it, but rippled as he passed by; rooms that seemed to change their dimensions as he watched; a place that gave off shrill vibrations he felt through his suit.

"Was there any illumination?" Dave said.

"Nothing I could see."

"Just abandoned? No signs of life?"

"I think it's been vacant for a long time. There are big open vaults inside, hundreds of meters on a side. Something must have been in them—maybe water or food—"

"—Or engines? Fuel?" Len said.

"Could be. Whatever it was, it's gone. If it was liquid it probably evaporated when this vent opened."

"Yes," Dave said, "that could be what made the cometary tail, the Flare Tail."

"I think it was. That, and the atmosphere that blew out through the crack. There's a lot of disorder inside—things ripped off the walls, strewn around, some gouges in the corridors that could have been made by things flying by. I picked up some of the smaller stuff lying around and brought it out."

No one said anything for a while. Jason put a hand to the cabin wall near him, feeling the wholeness of it, a dense seamless complexity the metal gave back to him. He looked out at a burnished rock shelf and sensed the problem before them as a piece of fine work to be done, something he could hold in one palm and turn to watch its facets catch the light, much as he had once seen in his mind Icarus slipping neatly toward the Earth at twenty miles a second, himself and Len arcing out to meet the tumbling mountain, administer the kick, race home, a clean problem with easy solutions that crumpled now and fell away with geometrical slowness, replaced by another darker vision that slowly cleared, details coming up from the middle distance and roughness gone, leaving—

Dave began, "Well, we can give you the time for another trip inside, Jason. Haul out everything you can, take some more photos. Then you and Len can rendezvous and get clear of the Egg and—"

"No."

"What?"

"No. We're not going to set off the Egg, are we, Len?"

"Jason—" Dave started.

"I don't know," Len said. "What have you got in mind?"

"Don't you see that this changes everything?"

"I wonder. We're trying to save millions of lives, Jason. When Icarus hits it's going to wipe out hundreds of square

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

miles and throw dirt into the air and probably change the climate. I kind of—"

"But it won't! Not now, anyway. Don't you see, Icarus is *hollow*. It has only a fraction of the mass we thought it did. Sure, it'll make a pretty big blast when it gets to India, but nothing like the disaster we thought."

Len said, "Maybe you've got something there."

"I can estimate the volume of rock left—"

"Jason, I've been talking to some people here at Houston. We started re-evaluating the collision dynamics and trajectory when you found the core was hollow. We'll have the results pretty soon, but until we do I just want to talk to you about this."

"Go ahead."

"Even if the mass of Icarus is a tenth of what we thought, its energy of impact will still be thousands of times larger than Krakatoa. The people in Bengal—"

"What's left of them, you mean," Len said. "The famine cycles have killed millions already, and they've been migrating out of the impact area for over a year now. Since the Indian government broke down, nobody knows how many souls we're talking about, Dave."

"That's right. But if you don't care about them, Len, think about the dust that will be thrown into the upper atmosphere. That might bring on another Ice Age alone."

Jason finished chewing on a bar of food concentrate. He felt a curious floating tiredness, his body relaxed and weak. The stimulants he had taken left him alert, but they could not wash away the lassitude that seeped through his arms and legs.

"I don't want to kill them, Dave. Stop being melodramatic. But we've got to admit that what we can learn from this relic may be worth some human life."

"What do you propose?"

"That we stay here for a week, ten days, stripping the inside of whatever we can. You fly us additional air and water—use one of the unmanned intercepts that's carrying a warhead right now. We'll get clear of Icarus in time for the other interceptors to home on it, and we'll use the Egg, too."

"Sounds like it might work," Len said, and Jason felt a surge of anticipation. He was going to do it; they couldn't turn him down.

"You know those interceptors aren't reliable in that dust cloud—that's why you guys are out there now. And the closer to Earth we hit Icarus, the less the net deflection before zero hour. If anything screws up at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the last minute, it might still smack into us."

"The risk is worth it, Dave," Len said.

"You're in on this too, Len? I had hoped—"

"We've got hopes, too," Jason said with sudden feeling. "Hopes that we might learn something here that will get the human race out of the mess it's in. A new physical concept, some invention that might come out of this. The beings who built this were superior to us, Dave, even in size—the doorways and corridors are big, wide. Maybe they helped our ancestors—"

"The *risk*, Jason! If the Egg doesn't do the job and—"

"We've got to take it."

"—We sent you men out there to do a job. Now you're—"

Jason wondered why Dave sounded so calm, even now. Perhaps they had told him to be deliberately cool and not provoke anything more. He wondered what his parents thought of this, taking a stand for exploration at the cost of people's lives. Or whether they knew of it at all—NASA had probably stopped news coverage as soon as they knew something was wrong; it wasn't just a heroic life-saving mission any more. He noticed his hands were trembling.

"Wait a minute, wait," Dave said. "I didn't mean to blow up that way, you guys. We all know you think you're doing the right thing." He paused amid the quiet burr of static, as though marshaling his words.

"Something new has come into the picture, though. I've just been handed the recomputed trajectory, allowing for the reduced Icarus mass. It makes a difference, a big one."

"How's that?" Jason said.

"It was coming in pretty oblique to the top of the atmosphere already, you remember. With less mass, though, it's going to skip a bit—not much, but enough. It'll skip like a flat rock on a pond, and then drop. That takes it clear of the Indian subcontinent and moves the impact point west."

Jason felt a thick weight of dread form in his stomach. "The ocean?"

"Yes. About two hundred miles out."

The finality of it consumed him. An ocean strike was vastly worse. Instead of dissipating energy as it ripped through the mantle rock, Icarus would throw up from the sea floor a towering geyser of steam. The steam jet would fan out across the upper atmosphere, leaving a planet swathed in clouds, driving great storms over a sunless world. The tidal wave splashed up would smash every coastal city on Earth, and most of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

civilization would vanish in hours.

"They're sure?" Len said.

"As certain as they can be," Dave said, and something veiled in his voice brought Jason back out of his contemplation.

"Cut off Houston for a minute, Len," he said.

"Sure. There. What is it?"

"How do we know David isn't lying?"

"Oh. . . . I guess we don't."

"It seems a little funny. A big rock skipping on the top of the atmosphere—one of the astrophysicists mentioned it in a briefing, but he said for a mass as large as Icarus it couldn't happen."

"What about for a tenth of that mass?"

"I don't know. And—damn it!—it's crucial."

"An ocean strike. . . If that happens, billions of people. . ."

"Right."

"You know. . . I don't think I want to. . ."

"I don't either." Jason paused. And something flitted across his mind.

"Wait a second," he said. "Something odd here. This rock is hollow, that makes it lighter."

"Sure. Less mass."

"But that will make it easier to fragment, too. The chance of having a big chunk of rock left around after we set off the Egg is less, too."

"I guess so."

"But why didn't Dave mention that? It makes the odds better."

"He's lying."

"Damn right he is," Jason said. Saying the words made him sure of it.

"So our chances are good."

"Better than Dave says, anyway. They must be."

"*If* the Egg goes off at all. We've hauled it all this way, maybe it's crapped out by now. They told us there would be a seven percent probability of that even before we left, remember. The thing might not work at all, Jason."

"I'll bet it's going to, though."

"How much?"

"What?"

"How much will you bet? The lives of the rest of the human race?"

"If I have to."

"You're crazy."

"No. The odds are good. Dave is lying to us."

"Why would he do that?"

Jason frowned. Len's doubts were beginning to reinforce his own. How sure *was* he? But he shook off the mood and said, "They don't want any *risk*, Len. They want two heroes and a lot of lives saved and no worries. They want to just keep it simple."

"And you're after—"

"I want to know what this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing is. Who built it. How they propelled it around, where they came from—"

"That's a lot to expect of a bunch of artifacts."

"Maybe not. I saw some panels and consoles in there, I think. Could be the computerized records they used are still around."

"If they used computers at all."

"They must've. If we could get to some of the storage units—"

"You think we could?"

Jason shrugged. "Yes, I think so. I don't *know*—nobody does. But if we can find out something new here, Len, it could pay off. New technology could get us out of the mess the world is in."

"Like what?"

"A new power source. Maybe something with higher efficiency. That would be worth the chance."

"Maybe."

"Well. . ." Jason felt his energy begin to drain away. "If you're not with me, Len. . ."

Jason wet his lips and waited. The sun lay hot on the rock rim above. Its light reflected in the cabin and deepened the lines of strain in his face. He found he was holding his breath.

Then: "Jason . . . look . . . don't put me on the spot like this."

Jason sealed his suit again, automatically. He reached up and popped the hatch cover.

"I . . . I've got to go with Dave, buddy. This thing is too big for me to—"

"Okay," Jason said abruptly. "Okay, okay."

"Look, I don't want you to feel—"

"Yeah." He reached up and pulled himself through the hatch, into the full glare. Looking up, his inner ear played a trick, and he suddenly felt as though he was falling down a narrow canyon and into the sun, drawn by it. Automatically he clung to the hatch and twisted himself out, letting his equilibrium return with the sense of motion. He felt curiously calm.

"Jason?"

He said nothing. Halfway along the module's length was a flat brown box the size of a typewriter. He went for it hand over hand, legs free, his breath sounding abnormally loud. The clamps around the box opened easily, and with one hand he swung it to his side and clipped it to his utility belt.

"Jason? Dave wants to know—"

"I'm here. Wait a second." He found the extra food and air units to the aft of the module—emergency supplies, easily portable. He felt clumsy with all of them clinging to his waist, but if he moved carefully he should

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be able to carry them some distance without tiring. Sluggishly he made his way to the dirty-gray rock below.

"Jason?"

He checked his suit. Everything seemed all right. The irony was inescapable: the blowout of gases through the vent made the cometary tail flare out from this ancient vessel, causing him and Len to come here and discover it—but that same eruption deflected Icarus enough to strike the Earth, and made necessary its destruction. Fate is a double-edged blade. A man ducks the blade only at the price of further risk, at greater stakes.

"Jason?"

He started toward the vent and then stopped. Might as well finish it. "Listen, Len—and be sure Dave hears this, too. I've got the arming circuits and the trigger. You can't set off the Egg without them. I'm taking them into the vent with me."

"Hey! Look—" Behind Len's voice was a faint chorus of cries from Houston. Jason went on.

"I'm going to hide them somewhere inside. Even if you follow me in, you won't be able to find them."

"Jesus! Jason, you don't under—"

"Shut up. I'm doing this for time, Len. Houston had better send us more air and supplies, because I'm going to use the full week of margin I think we've got. One week—to look for something worth saving out of this derelict. Maybe those computer banks, if there are any."

"No, no, listen," Len said, a thin edge of desperation in his voice. "You're not just gambling with those Indians, man. Or even with everybody who lives near the seacoasts, if you even care about that. If the Egg doesn't work and Houston can't reach that rock with the unmanned warheads, and it hits the water—"

"There'll be storms."

"Enough to keep a shuttle from coming up to get us."

"I don't think they'd want to bother, anyway," Jason said wryly. "We won't be too popular."

"*You* won't, Jason. *You*."

"The search will be twice as effective if you come down here and help, Len." Jason smiled to himself. "You can gain us some time that way."

"You son of a bitch!"

He began moving toward the vent again. "Better hurry up, Len. I won't stick around out here for long to guide you in."

"Shit! You used to be a nice guy, Jason. Why are you acting like such a bastard now?"

"I never had a chance to be a bastard for something I believed in before," he said, and kept moving. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here is a delightful tale about a mystery writer and his dog Dash (after Hammett, of course). Warner Law has been writing for films and TV since 1942 but did not begin writing short fiction until 1968. His first published story, "The Man Who Fooled the World," appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post* and won a Mystery Writers of America Edgar Award. Most of his recent stories have been published in *Playboy*, and he is also the winner of the Playboy Award for best work by a new writer.

The Alarming Letters From Scottsdale

by WARNER LAW

C. BENNINTON & SON
PUBLISHERS
551 FIFTH AVE.
NEW YORK 10071

May 27, 1972

Henry Hesketh, Esq.
"Hesketh Hill"
Rural Route # 1
Scottsdale
Arizona 85256

Dear Godfather Henry:

Hello, there! How are you? Long time no hear. How comes the newest Homer McGrew mystery novel? It's been over three months since Dad and I responded enthusiastically to your outline, and not even a note from you.

As you well know, if we don't get the manuscript soon, it will be too late for our Fall list, which would mean that for the first time in nineteen years there won't be a new Homer McGrew for Christmas.

Since you live all alone up in that hilltop showplace without a phone, we worry when you don't keep in touch.

Dad is away on his annual European business trek, so I'll be minding the store until he gets back.

Do drop me a line, soon.

Your loving Godson,
Bill Benninton

HESKETH HILL
SCOTTSDALE
ARIZONA

June 1, 1972

Dear Godson Bill:

I am just fine, but thanks for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wondering. I hadn't realized so much time had gone by.

I was halfway through the new Homer McGrew when I was captured by a dog.

That is, I was cooking beef stew a la Erle Stanley Gardner—I wheedled his recipe from him, years back—when a large dog walked in my kitchen. He looked to be a cross between a German shepherd and something, and he was painfully thin and obviously starving. So of course I gave him some stew, and he hasn't left my side to this day. I've never had a dog before, ever.

He wore no collar. I tried to find his owner, but failed. He's far from a cute or even handsome dog; he looks to be a dignified ten or so years old.

But he has remarkable eyes. They are clear and direct and intelligent, and they remind me strongly of the eyes of Dashiell Hammett, whom I first met in the '30's, when he was pioneering the tough detective novel, and had just become famous for *The Maltese Falcon.* Hammett was not only my close friend but my teacher; much of what I know about the mystery novel came from him. He also spent a long weekend here with me a few years before his death in 1961. Anyways, in his honor I've named the dog Dashiell—Dash, for short. He seldom leaves my side, and even insists on sleeping on the foot of my bed, which is sometimes not too comfortable for me because he's gained considerable weight.

Dash sits now at my feet as I type, and whenever I pause he slaps a foot with a paw as if to say, "Get back to work, you lazy lout!" I imagine he merely likes the clatter of the electric typewriter.

But I swear to you that Dash is close to being human; he seems to understand every word I say. And—don't laugh, now—he even helps me with my story problems. That is, whenever my plot could go one way or another, I explain the alternatives to him—trying to use the same tone of voice—and Dash listens attentively. When he doesn't fancy my suggestions, he lays his head on the floor and sighs wearily; when he does like an idea, his eyes light up—just as Dashiell Hammett's used to when he encouraged me—and he slaps his tail vigorously on the carpet. Dash has saved me from going up many blind alleys.

Anyway, I've decided to put Homer McGrew aside and write instead a book titled: *Dash—My Exciting True Life Experiences As a Dog Detective.* It will be written by Dash himself in the first person, "As Told To Henry Hesketh." Naturally, I will have to do considerable inventing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Please give my love to father Cyrus when next you write him.

Love,
Henry

June 8, 1972

Dear Henry:

I was relieved to hear that you're well, and pleased that you've found such a good friend in Dash. A book about a dog detective might well be a fine idea. After all, Lassie herself often plays a detective role.

However, might it not be better to finish the Homer McGrew first? You will disappoint many, many of your eager fans if there's not a new mystery novel from you this year.

By the way, I've just learned that Homer is nudging Perry Mason in total paperback sales. This is no small achievement, and I don't think you'll ever have to worry about money, for as long as you live.

I feel I should warn you that Dad has always had an aversion to what he calls "literary anthropomorphism," by which he means the ascription of human qualities to things not human. He will not read—let alone publish—books written in the first person by dogs, cats, parrots, automobiles or frying pans. He was once sent into such a rage by a four-pound manuscript titled: *I WAS AN UNSLOTHFUL THREE-TOED SLOTH* that he broke his office window with it and it fell six stories down to the street and narrowly missed Bennett Cerf, who happened to be walking by.

Dad is fully aware that many good writers have written successfully in this manner, but it's simply not his cup of tea.

Had you considered writing about Dash in the third person?

Dad writes from London that his trip is going well. Next stop, Edinburgh.

Love,
Bill

June 12, 1972

Dear Bill:

I'm sorry, but I have grown goddamn weary of Homer McGrew over the years, and I'd like to write something else for a change.

But apart from this, your letter upset me and made me unhappy, and when I read the letter aloud to Dash, he listened with hurt eyes and then went into a corner and whimpered.

But I will let Dash speak for himself: Dear Mr. Benninton:

I was considerably disappointed to hear that your father would not be interested in the book I am writing about my life as a Dog Detective, in the first person.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The reason that Henry wants *me* to write the book is because he wants the reader to know how I really think about things, rather than what Henry *thinks* I think.

Would you believe that I'm learning to TYPE!? Yes, I AM! One night when Henry went to bed, he left his electric typewriter running by mistake, and I wandered into his office and got into his chair and began to strike the letters with my paws. I like the sound it makes. I like best the automatic repeating keys that go XXXXXXX AND . . . . . .

Henry heard me typing and came in and was amazed, but was a little disappointed because what I typed made no sense at all. But then my paws are so big I can't strike one key at a time.

Then Henry got a wonderful idea, and he took two unsharpened pencils and fastened them to my front paws with adhesive tape, so that the eraser ends stuck out three or so inches past my paws, and with these pencils I can touch one key at a time.

Henry sits me in his typing chair with a strap around me so I won't fall forwards or sideways.

Then he holds my paws and touches the keys with the pencils, and black marks appear on the paper, like magic!

Here is an example of my typing:

HII XXXXXXXXXXTH ERE!! THID ID DADH T Y X X X X X X X X X X-PINGGGG!!! . . . .

Of course I make mistakes. But I am learning about the space bar and the automatic carriage return, which I like to hit because they make nice noises.

Now, Henry is trying to teach me to type *without* holding my paws. He thinks I might learn to type my own name—by rote, as it were. He is using what he calls the "conditioned reflex and reward system." He points to the letter "D," and if I strike it I get one of the tidbits I like, such as foie gras on a cracker, or a chocolate-covered cherry. Then if I next hit an "A" I get another tidbit.

The story of my life is coming along fine! Yesterday I wrote a chapter about my very first case as a Detective. In it, I tracked some hijackers to their hideout and was held prisoner by them. But I found an electric light wall switch and I turned it off and on and off and on and the police finally saw it and came and captured the crooks.

Now I am going to try to type all by myself!

Your pal,
DASXX DAS. . .H

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

P.S. I think that is pretty good for a dog!!

June 15, 1972

Cyrus Benninton, Esq.
The George Hotel
Edinburgh
Scotland

Dear Dad:

I'm enclosing some recent letters between Henry Hesketh and myself. I'm more than a little worried; I feel he's on the verge of flipping.

Were he another kind of writer, I wouldn't be too concerned. But Henry has always been as tough-minded and as cynical and as hard-headed as his own Homer McGrew.

It's not that I'm greatly concerned about getting a new mystery out of him; it's his state of mind that worries me.

Do you have any suggestions as to what I might do to help ease him through and then out of his present mental condition?

Your loving son,
Bill

June 18, 1972

Dear Son:

I'm gravely concerned by what Henry's letters reveal. The fact that he is still a good writer makes me have continually to remind myself that poor Dash can't be held responsible for what Henry keeps putting into his mind. The poor dog is just sitting in his dignity in his corner minding his own business—or sitting under duress at Henry's typewriter and being bribed by tidbits—while Henry imagines what is going on in the dog's non-existent conscious mind.

This damn dog fixation and this rather sickening cuteness run directly counter to Henry's nature—as I've come to know it over twenty-seven years.

It must be remembered that Henry is pushing seventy-five, and that he boozes it up quite a bit, and has been through five marriages, but has lived all alone on his hill for the last eleven years.

Don't forget also that Henry began as a serious novelist, but failed, and then turned to writing Homer McGrews. These made him rich, but he's always thought of himself as a failure.

Although literary anthropomorphism may not be my cup of tea, I do find some charm in it, in moderation, for it's after all a conscious effort of the mind to project itself into the minds of animals, thus making us feel less alone in our trip through Space-Time.

But there is a big difference between this conscious projection and an unconscious removal of part of the mind

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into the imagined minds of animals. It's similar to retreating into a dream world to escape the real world.

This is what Henry's doing, and it could well mean that he is hiding that part of himself which he dislikes in the "mind" of his dog. This is close to being a kind of death wish; it could presage suicide.

I of course feel sorry for Dash, who is slowly being murdered. Not so much by Henry. After all, Dash could refuse all those fattening tidbits, or he could run away. But, lacking any consciousness of self, the dog is being killed by his incapacity to deny his own appetites.

To be practical: I have two suggestions. The first is that you get from your Uncle Fred the name of a good Scottsdale psychiatrist, and have him standing by.

The second is that you put your tongue in your cheek and write a letter of encouragement about Dash's autobiography. Lie about me, if it helps. It's possible that Henry could purge himself of this nonsense by finishing the book.

Surely there cannot be more than *one* book in this dog. Unless, of course, Henry should teach the dog to play the piano. A second volume, titled: *How I Played Chopin in Carnegie Hall* is a fearful prospect.

I joke because I am really quite worried about Henry. Edinburgh I find a lonely city. That I love you goes without saying. That I miss you I will say.

Dad

June 23, 1972

Dear Friend Dash:

Thanks so much for the letter. I think it's wonderful that you're learning to type! Maybe you will get so good that you can type your whole book all by yourself! The more I read what you write, the more I like the idea of your own book in your own words about your own exciting life as a Dog Detective.

Dad has changed his mind and would love to publish your book. So hurry and finish it, fella! My best to Henry.

Your pal,
Bill Benninton

C. BENNINTON & SON
PUBLISHERS
551 FIFTH AVE.
NEW YORK 10071

June 23, 1972

Harold F. Seller, MD
Medical-Dental Bldg.
Scottsdale, Arizona

Dear Dr. Seller:

Dr. Frederick Carter of this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

city has given me your name. He is my uncle, and he remembers you well from Menninger Clinic days. He thinks you might be willing to help my father and myself with a problem.

As you may know, the novelist Henry Hesketh lives outside Scottsdale. We've published his Homer McGrew mysteries for many years, and he's my father's close friend, and also my godfather.

Recently, my father and myself have become increasingly disturbed by his letters to me. Put bluntly and unscientifically, they seem to indicate a growing mental disturbance in relation to his pet dog. More than that I don't think I should say, lest you prejudge him.

We are hoping that this condition will pass. But if it worsens, would it be possible for you to visit Henry Hesketh on some pretext, and give us your impression of his behavior? It goes without saying that we would expect to pay you a fee for this.

Cordially,
William Benninton

June 27, 1972

Dear Bill:

Henry says I can call you by your first name. I am so thrilled that you and your father like the idea of my book after all!

I am now writing a chapter about my last master who was so angry with me because I could not learn the MORSE CODE and he was mean and beat me with a stick and let me get all skinny and hungry all the time. So I jumped out of a truck near Scottsdale and looked around, hoping I'd find some nice person. I am so happy it was Henry, because he has given me such a nice warm home and lots of affection and he feeds me so GOOD!

My typing is coming along just fine! Henry doesn't have to point at the letters any more. I have made a connection in my mind between the SOUND of the letters and the various keys, and so Henry stands by me and TELLS me the letters and I try to hit the right ones, and if I do I get a tidbit. Henry has found that next to chocolate cherries I like caviar on a cracker the best. The real caviar, all the way from Iran! I eat a whole big jar every day.

Henry found me a big pair of glasses without any lenses in them and he puts them on my head with a rubber band. He's also bought me a baseball cap which he puts on my head backwards. I didn't like these at first because they are scarcely dignified, but Henry says I look distinguished and he has taken photos of me at the typewriter, to illustrate my book.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Henry and I have so many good times together. Except I was a BAD DOG the other night. Henry never sleeps very well, and this night he had a few boozies and some sleeping pills, and he always sleeps with his head under his pillow, and anyway during the night I got so lonely I came up the bed and went to sleep on Henry's pillow and almost smothered him! So now I have to sleep on his feet and not on his head.

Henry says I should type something all by myself to end this letter. Here it is. Henry is going to leave the room.

XXXXXXXXXX. . . .HI T HER . . .E THID IDDASHTY XXXXXXXXXXXPINGGG BYEB . . . . . .YE

P.S. Henry came back and said that was so good that I am going to get a chocolate eclair full of real whipped cream!

HAROLD F. SELLER, MD
MEDICAL-DENTAL BLDG.
SCOTTSDALE
ARIZONA

June 28, 1972

Dear Mr. Benninton:

On a professional basis I would be extremely reluctant to intrude upon the privacy of Henry Hesketh.

However, as it happens I know him, casually. I met him first in a local bookstore, some months ago. I told him I was a Homer McGrew fan, and that I was lucky enough to own some rare first editions of the earliest books. He said that if I ever wished them autographed, I should stop by his house.

Time passed, and I never got around to it. A month ago I met him in the street. He reminded me I hadn't been by with my books.

I still haven't paid him the visit. But should you tell me you feel the need has arisen, I will make a point of dropping by, since I have a valid reason.

I won't do this as a doctor. Forget any fee. I will do it because I admire Hesketh, and because Fred Carter is an old friend, and because you and your father are so obviously concerned, and also, because we are all members of the human race together.

Sincerely,
Harold F. Seller

July 5, 1972

HIII THEREXXXXX THIDID DAS HTYXXXX PING. . . . . .

Dear Bill:

Do you know that I typed that all by myself, when Henry was asleep? Yes, I did!

Henry leaves the pencils on my paws all night, and his electric typewriter humming and his light on in his office,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

because sometimes in the night I come in and jump into his chair and support myself with my left paw on the lid of the typewriter and strike the keys with the pencil on my right paw. Henry comes in and finds my typing in the morning, and if it makes any sense at all he gives me a big dish of LOBSTER NEWBURG for my breakfast.

I've just written a wonderful chapter about how I went after and tracked down a mean old porcupine who had been girdling and killing Henry's big pine trees, except that when I caught the animal I got a lot of his NASTY quills in my face and nose. Henry had to pull them all out one by one and it HURT! OoooooooH! But Henry kissed it well and the pain has gone ALL AWAY.

Henry has ordered an electric organ for me. He is going to teach me to play BACH on it! Whatever that is. He says if I get good enough maybe I can give a little recital in a church he knows, near here. He says I can also make some recordings, and sell them to lots of people! Bye, bye, now. I am going to type again just for you.

HI THER ETHID IS DAS HT XXXXYPING.... BYEBYEEEEEXXXXXX

NEW YORK NY SRX TC 559 JUL 7 72 HAROLD SELLER MD MEDICAL DENTAL BLDG SCOTTSDALE ARIZ 2:22 PM

I FEEL IT WOULD BE WISE IF YOU WOULD VISIT HESKETH AT YOUR EARLY CONVENIENCE

BENNINTON

SCOTTSDALE ARIZ PFG 732 JULY 8 72 BENNINTON 551 FIFTH AVE NYC 11:23 AM

I AM GRIEVED TO REPORT THAT WHEN I VISITED HESKETH THIS MORNING I FOUND THAT HE HAD DIED IN HIS SLEEP. AUTHORITIES NOTIFIED. WRITING DETAILS. MY SYMPATHY TO YOU.

SELLER

HAROLD F. SELLER, MD
MEDICAL-DENTAL BLDG.
SCOTTSDALE
ARIZONA

July 8, 1972

Dear Mr. Benninton:

Again let me extend my sympathy to you and your father. I realize you have lost a dear friend.

I drove to Hesketh's house around nine this morning. There was no answer to my several rings, but a dog barked inside. When no one came to the door, I decided to leave.

But as I walking back to my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

car, a huge dog came around the corner of the house and up to me. He is the most monstrously obese dog I've ever seen. He is so outrageously fat he can scarcely walk. Also, and this puzzled me at first, there were pencils taped to his paws—eraser ends protruding. I finally guessed that their purpose was to keep him from scratching himself.

The dog indicated I should come with him, and he led me around the house to an open glass door. It was through this that I found Hesketh in his bed, his head under his pillow. He had been dead for some hours.

The blueness of his skin clearly indicated asphyxia. But how? There was no sign of any struggle.

Three clues gave me a probable answer. There were a few remaining drops of whiskey in a glass on the bedside table. There was also a bottle of sleeping pills. In addition, the top side of his pillow was covered with dog hairs.

So I can only conclude that Hesketh had ingested both alcohol and barbiturates, and went to sleep with his head under his pillow. Suicide is not indicated, for the sleeping pill bottle was very nearly full. I feel sure he would have awakened in the morning.

But I fear that during the night this huge dog came and lay upon his master's pillow and suffocated Hesketh while he remained in an intensely deep sleep.

It is tragic and ironic and somewhat incredible, but it is certainly physically possible, considering the great weight of the dog.

I then walked around the house to find a phone, but there is none. Nothing was amiss, but Hesketh's electric typewriter had been left running in his office, and his desk lamp was on. While switching off the typewriter, I noticed some typing in the machine. I tried to read it, but couldn't. It is gibberish—typed, I fear, by a man who has had quite a few drinks and pills and is falling asleep at his typewriter. Or, possibly, it could be some kind of code, but I greatly doubt it. I pulled this typing out of the machine because I didn't want to have anyone find it and try to make something out of it. The circumstances of Hesketh's death will make enough newspaper copy as it is.

When I left the house the dog was anxious to come with me, and so I took him.

After reporting the news to the sheriff's office in person, I stopped off with the dog at the office of a veterinary surgeon friend.

When he examined the dog he was gravely shocked—even

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

horrified. He said he had never seen a dog who had been so grossly overfed. He surmised that the dog had been deprived of proper food and had been fed large quantities of sugars and fats. He told me that if this diet had continued much longer the poor dog was doomed to die.

I have decided to keep the dog, until and unless someone lays claim to him. I would like to restore him to good condition, with a proper diet and exercise.

Also, I find the dog tremendously appealing. He is affectionate, and in his ability to understand my every word he seems close to being human.

I've lived alone since my wife died two years ago, and I'll be happy to have the dog for company. He will have a good home with me.

Sincerely,
Harold F. Seller

P.S. I enclose the sheet of paper I found in Hesketh's typewriter. It's possible that this random typing might make some sense to you, although I very much doubt it.

H.F.S.

TH ISISD ASHT
YPING.....IW XXXX
ASBEI INGMUR D
E R E D B Y M Y I
N A B I L I T Y T O C
O N Q U E R M - Y O
WNGREE D.....
IT WA SEI THERH
E N R Y O R M E
X X X X X X X I A M D O
U B L Y S O R R Y F
O, RMYC RIME BEC
A U S E N O W I N M
. . . .Y N E X T R E I N
C A R N A T I O N I W I
L L H A V E T O C O
M E B A C K A S A N E V
.....ENLOW ERCREA
T U R E S U C H A S A R A
T XXXXXXXXX THI
SIS DAS HIELLHA
M M E T T T Y P I N G
.....

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AVRAM DAVIDSON

BOOKS

BEST SCIENCE FICTION FOR 1972, Frederik Pohl, ed., Ace, $1.25

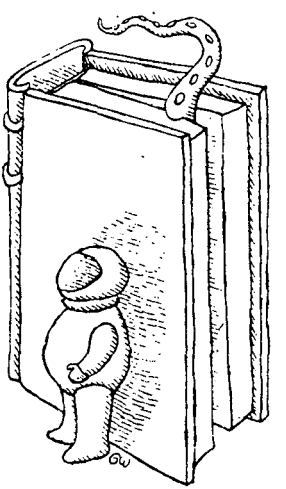
THE GUNS OF AVALON, Roger Zelazny, Doubleday, $5.95

THE PRITCHER MASS, Gordon R. Dickson, Doubleday, $4.95

THE GOLD AT THE STARBOW'S END, Frederik Pohl, Ballantine, $1.25

IN MY PREVIOUS COLUMN (I am inhibited from the editorial *We* by reason of there being more than one reviewer for The Magazine), I reviewed four anthologies of the annual sort, three of them bearing the word BEST in their bosom. And now here comes the annual Ace BEST, and its editor begins his introduction with the frank admission that, "Every science-fiction anthology that includes the word 'best' in its title starts out with a lie. In the first place, there isn't any such thing. What's one man's best is another man's poison." Well said.

This volume has a cheerful bright cover (but *WHO* was the cover artist, who?), and although the book seems to show signs of haste. I constantly barked my eye-shins over the insufficient typographical distinction between introduction and story, between what was just ending and what was just beginning. However, I read on. And so should you. Thus I had the pleasure of reading, for example, Larry Niven's "Inconstant Moon," which I liked much better than his (Hugo-winning) "The Fourth Profession," reviewed in my last. Although I cannot truly say that "Moon" has a pleasant theme, it has nevertheless a pleasant *taste*, despite. Take astronomy, meteorology, and



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

human nature, add a jigger of sex, local color, one hailstorm, six kinds of cheese, and shake well. Sip slowly in a tall apartment house. A *very* tall apartment house. . .

Time: last July. Scene: the ANTHRAX depot in Saffron Cisco. ANTHRAX's top man in S.C., let us call him "Mr. Palmer," has just informed me that, previous opinion to the contrary, although ANTHRAX cannot provide the sleeper space paid for in advance on my trip to Seattle, neither is it going to refund the difference, pronto: so there. Neither will it provide a voucher for credit in the dining car. The trip takes a day and I have no money? I was counting on the refund? Tough. Behind the bright new ANTHRAX signs and the bright new hundred million dollars of the public's money is the same old railroad motto, *The public be damned*. And if this sort of treatment alienates the few people left who *want* to travel by rail, and US passenger traffic just goes dodo-dead? Why, bless you, why should the railroad people care? They've already *got* the hundred million. *And* their guaranteed pensions, too. You some kind of trouble-maker? (Goddamn train was six hours late, too.)

Providence, however, not feeling that fasting would be that good for my soul, sent me rescue in the form of Mr. Paul Williams, jazz critic and Science Fiction fan, and his charming Japanese wife, Sachiko, who were also going to Seattle and who also had (a) food money for three, and (b) a couple of kind hearts. And all this leads up to how I had learned, back in July, what, exactly, Ms. Judith Merril is doing in Japan. . .and to "The Sunset, 2217 A.D.," by Ryu Mitsuse, translated by Mr. Tetsu Yano *and* Ms. Judith Merril. *That's* what she's doing in Japan (riding some *good* trains, too).

Japanese SF has been around, but what do we know of it, being ignorant not of its names alone, but its very traditions. (Japanese fantasy is something else, thanks to Lafcadio Hearn, and a few others.) Ms. Merril has set herself the difficult task of learning the vastly different Japanese language—not just to say, "Two of these and how much are those?" but to be able to *translate* from Japanese into English. Her collaborator (on this and other stories), Tetsu Yano, is the chief SF translator from English into Japanese. Mitsuse-san's story is about Captain Shira-i, a cyborg, one whose space-wrecked human body has been replaced by a semi-robotic one: in itself, no new idea. This story, however, does not concern itself with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

how that happened, but with several days in his life long after it has happened. The story, set in the city on Mars where Shira-i keeps a souvenir stand for tourists, rings both alien and true. And I wish Ms. Merril all further success with her katakana and her hiragana.

The mysterious James Tiptree, Jr. is his invariably capable self in "Mother In The Sky With Diamonds," a space opera in the very best sense of the words—has JT's invariable good luck with future slang, too, once you get into it. He makes us smell, taste, and feel "the Crash of Matter and the Wrack of Worlds." (Addison's *Cato*, if you want to know. —Uh... Cato on Plato? Cato on *Pluto?* Hell with it. Damn good story.)

"Conversational Mode," by new writer Grahame Leman, is a bitter-funny tale about a—here I must tell Michael Kurland's story about the real hospital with a real little kid in it; next to his bed was a two-way speaker in a wall-panel; Nurse, not having heard anything for a long time, asked, "Are you all right, Tommy? *Tommy?* Are you—" And Tommy, stiff-upper-lipping it, said, "Whaddaya want, Wall?" Well, in this case, the "patient" is a grown man, the "hospital" is something else, and the Voice (or, likelier, Tape. . .or. . .*Something*) is not at *all* like Nursey. *Fun*ny-bitter. More, Leman, more!

Equally new to me is Doris Piserchia, here with "Sheltering Dream." It has a touch of the naive, a touch of the not-fully-realized, a tremor of genuine emotion, all of the sort which we find sometimes in newly-hatched writers. (G. Leman was not hatched, he sprang fully grown). I don't mean to sound lofty. It is a respectable story, and it is what it is.

Harlan Ellison is here, not once: twice. "At The Mouse Circus" is a real ring-a-ding-ding razzmatazz of an Ellison story, and what it all means I don't know and don't *care*. And for all that it rests upon a myth or legend shared fondly by Rednecks and Brown—that of the Negro man as Big Black Stud, *mmmph!*—it is still a *good* story. "Silent in Gehenna" is not that good at all. It starts out and continues for most of itself as an If This Goes On story, the This being Repression on Campus—and not, you bet your button, repression on the campus of ol' Eighth Route Army U. in Hanchow, either, where the kids know their place—and then goes off into East Nowhere, via the old Allegory Trail. Pit-ty.

H.H. Hollis's "Too Many People" is a story which protrudes at a slight angle to the unborn corpse of a story

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which *I* almost wrote. Disentangling myself from this, I am able to say (I trust, dispassionately) that although it is just somehow not as effective as it should be, it is still a story which can and does tell you one Hell of a lot about *why* all our efforts to control overpopulation just ain't workin'. It is not exactly the story of an aphrodisiac birth control pill. Close, though.

John Brunner in "The Easy Way Out," story of a brave young physician, a spoiled rich cub, and a wrecked space ship, is not the John Brunner whom we all know and respect. Even Homer sometimes nods, and, in picking this one, so did Mr. Frederik Pohl.

On the other hand, he no more nodded than he (by his own say-so) blotted a line when he—Frederik Pohl, that is—wrote this book's concluding story, "The Gold At The Starbow's End." If I say that I was surprised how good it was, that might sound as though I was surprised F.P. could be good: not so. The beginning didn't even see the middle. It contains multitudes. Politics. Space travel. Demagoguery. Sex. The Quest for Pure Science. The *I-Ching*. Betrayal. Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck. You pluck, too. Read it.

Usually I don't read the blurb before the book, as it often tells me more than I want to know in advance. However, I hadn't read much of THE GUNS OF AVALON when I began to believe that it must be a sequel: and so it is, to NINE PRINCES IN AMBER, which I haven't read, and shan't attempt to reconstruct. If you like the sword and sorcery sub-genre, you will certainly want to read NINE PRINCES (if you haven't already) before reading AVALON.

As the title hints, the book impinges on the Arthurian legend, but—just in case you are suffering from a surfeit of orferies—it does not impinge on it hardly at all. This is an intensely complicated account of an intensely complicated family—the get of King Uther, if I understand right—and if I don't, it's not for want of exposition: pages and pages of exposition. And, although mainly the book is set in that fantastick otherworld which we may term Faërie, short parts of it are set in our own, regarded as a shadow of that other. The concept of *shadow* is very important here. . .and so is the Tarot, particularly the major trumps, the author's use of which I found rather interesting—more interesting by far than the semi-continual clatter of claymores, of Evial Circles expanding Evially, and Hell-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fiends cavorting continually—and all in a feudaloid background (everyone would like to be a king or baron, but no one wants to be a serf of thrall).

My lack of enthusiasm may, I fear, be showing through my well-known politeness. There is nothing outrageously *bad* in his book of magic, intrigue, and warfare, but very little that is very good. Of the latter I greatly liked the description of the journey to the Skeleton Coast of Southwest Africa. With the exception of one minor character, a spear-carrier who is hanged by a leg (the Tarot again), I did not feel for any of these characters the slightest empathy, sympathy, or even osteopathy, although—by my codpiece and baldachino!—how their poor bones do keep aching, ache ache ache, all that jewellers' rouge and no aspirin. This sequel will certainly have a sequel. Mr. Zelazny's protagonist, Corwin, says, "We select a possibility and we walk till we reach it." In THE GUNS OF AVALON, I am afraid, the author does not reach it.

Ah me, time was when I could (though not, I admit, very often) run a new novel up the flagpole whilst saluting vigorously—either that or toss and gore and trample it, kicking the sawdust with a fine disdain. But neither of this issue's novels allows me either action. To be sure, nor Zelazny nor Dickson has ever written a sloppy line, and you may read THE PRITCHER MASS, as you may AVALON, without one cry of outrage escaping your lips. So, then, onward.

Recently I approached an editor about the possibility of a relinquished out-of-print book of mine, contents thereof being describable as historical adventures, misadventures, and crimes. His reply: "Not unless it's very closely tied in with the Mafia." I've been trying and *trying* to fit Joey Bananas into the Battle of Balaclava, so I appreciate Gordon Dickson's efforts here at getting a *crime syndicate* to sit up and perform. The other key phrases of THE PRITCHER MASS are: *ecological disaster, chain perception, man pursued, wild talents harnessed.* Some time in, I suppose, the next century, a poisonous spore has made life in the open air generally unsafe for human life. A young man named Chaz Sant (not, perhaps, Mr. Dickson's happiest coinage in the mint of names), whose personality "has no gears for turning into reverse," has been working hard on passing the psychological examination required for leaving Earth to work on The Pritcher Mass. Although Mr. Dickson does not and probably cannot be very

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

specific in describing this, nevertheless he succeeds in suspending disbelief; and then Something Outside smashes into the drab Inside, and away we go. As for the possibility that a mass application of paranormal talents might have results, and beneficial ones, too. . .well, Mr. Dickson, almost thou persuadest me. "The Mass is subjective [and] can be used by almost anyone who can work with it. . ." —thus, Pritcher's Mass. As for Dickson's MASS, well, it's not exactly in B Minor. More like B-minus. **Sigh**

The title story of Frederik Pohl's collection, THE GOLD AT THE STARBOW'S END, I reviewed in my review of the Ace BEST; if you didn't read it in that book, read it in this book. It has flashes of fun, though mostly, like the concluding story, "The Merchants of Venus" (NOT a top title, Fred), it is serious. The others, though containing grimth, are really only cheerful grimth. "Sad Solarian Screenwriter Sam" has the familiar troop of hyperpowerful-yet-comical-aliens who are here to-test-mankind, also the equally familiar-by-now Hollywood Cheapjack Writer, Hollywood Cheapjack Agent, Hollywood Cheapjack Producer: familiar, yes; funny, also yes. "Call Me Million," is (I guess) about an Eater of Souls. We haven't had an Eater of Souls for a long time. I guess we won't have another one for a long time, so enjoy this one. *I* did. The protagonist of "Shaffery Among The Immortals" is, however, something absolutely new. . .to me, anyway. . .to whiz, a Cheapjack Astronomer. There is a Mafia in this one, too, but a sort of non-bloody one, nothing to give godfathers a bad name. "The Merchants of Venus" (NOT a top title, Fred) is really a novelette. Or novella. An odd but successful combination of treasure-hunting on an airless planet, extra-terrestrial archaeology, and what life might be like if there were but *no* free medical care whatsobloodyever. The ending is like O. Henry. . .if O. Henry had written more like Poe. The price of the book is only five times what it would have been twenty years ago, and I hope the author is getting five times what he got twenty years ago (though I doubt it): because if he isn't, who is?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This inventive story concerns a group of telepaths who have been stripped of their powers and been left with little but painful memories and one unique ability that causes them to be enlisted "in the service of man." Its young (21) author writes that he is an actor, "now working summer stock and the New York audition rounds. When I'm not working theatre, I write."

Psimed

by C. S. CLAREMONT

SHE WAS DREAMING WHEN the emergency call shrilled her awake, and for a moment she wasn't sure where she was. Her eyes registered the abstract pastel shades of her living cubicle, but her mind refused to believe them, preferring its own reality, the north England farm she and Sam had bought just after their marriage. Then, a second, imperative call filled the room, and her eyes and mind focused, her hand reaching out for the bedside com unit. She hadn't seen the farm in eight years, since Sam's death; it had been sold by the UN.

She left the video circuit off.

"Dr. Hamlyn?" The voice was young, excited, unfamiliar to her, probably some intern standing emergency room duty. She grunted a reply, stretching the rest of her body awake.

"We have a possible case of Siebert's Plague in E-One, Doctor." She came totally awake then, shocked and frightened as she opened the cubicle's computer terminal; there hadn't been a case of Siebert's in the New York Area for over a year, since the introduction of the new Japanese-Israeli vaccine, and everyone had been so sure that it would work, that the disease had finally been beaten. "It's a boy, Caucasian, about eleven years old; a meter forty-nine tall by forty-four and a half kilos mass; in good physical condition with no apparent deficiencies or deviations from the nominal curves. . ."

"A moment, Doctor, please." She looked over the data silently flashing across her terminal's scanscreen, pertinent tapes on the disease stored in the MedCenter's Prime Date Bank. "You say the boy might

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have Plague; what're your reasons?"

"Well, he was on line for the morning show at Radio City, and his sitter said that all of a sudden he collapsed, just crumpled into what sounds like a complete paralysis. Luckily, there was a police emergency unit on duty there for the Christmas crowds; they gave him mouth-to-mouth and heart stimulation until an ambulance arrived."

"Any psi reports?" She broke in.

"Yes ma'am. From NBC; one of their sensitives picked him up as he crumpled, a strong signal, says he heard a loud cry of pain, fear too. We've also got some scattered reports from Standard Oil and Time-Life, but they're not specific enough to be conclusive; there's just too much psi activity around there most of the time to get a decent pickup unless you're right on top of it. Anyway, when Hank—Dr. Aurelio—got him plugged into the ambulance systems, the boy tripped the psi sensors into deep orange, a very ragged pattern. We checked it with the PDB and got a Siebert warning almost immediately; Dr. O'Conner said to call you."

"Kind of her." Logical, though, all things considered; if it was Siebert's, it was her baby and the quicker she got to work, the better. If it wasn't, the E-One team would be more than able to handle matters until the boy was seconded to a ward. "Is the boy on life support?"

"Only partial now; his vital signs have been firming up nicely since we brought him in."

"Any obvious brain damage?"

"Not to his involuntary systems. We haven't been able to check out his voluntary faculties yet."

"All right. Keep him in E-One, but in a quarantined module, together with any staff who've had prolonged exposure to him. . ."

"Already done." The voice had lost its earlier excitement, replacing it with a cool, experienced confidence.

"Good boy. And the sitter?"

"She's in a connected module, undergoing examination, also under quarantine."

"Good. Run both of them through a full psiprobe series; coordinate the tests with the duty staff in Ward 7. Also, find Dr. Janscer and call him in as soon as he can make it. I'll be up to check on the boy in a few minutes. Got that?"

"Got it, Doctor. We'll try and have the preliminary readouts ready for you by then."

"Thanks." She cut the connection and trudged into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her 'fresher stall, conscious of the AV scanners following her nude body, yet ignoring them. They'd been a part of her life nearly eight years now, this constant audio-visual scan—"for your own good, dear" explained the nannyish psychologist at Crannington, just after her committal, "to protect you from yourself"—she'd gotten used to them eventually, and they only bothered her when she thought about them, which was rare.

Despite the urgency of the E-room's call, she dressed carefully, as she always did, ignorning the modern unisex fashions and their somber color patterns. She wore dresses most of the time—knee-length, a few daringly cut to midthigh—loose things with vibrant, autumnal colors; to complement the dresses she wore scarves and light jewelry—rings, bracelets, necklaces, chokers, belts, anything her gypsy friends at Cornell and Hunter could smuggle in to her past Johnny Picieri's understanding but officially disapproving eyes. Johnny was one of the few staff members who really understood her need to stand out, the others accepting her eccentricity the same way they accepted her brilliance, though she'd often heard the word whore coupled with her name in lounge conversation. And there'd been two abortive rapes during her first years at Manhattan-South; ironically, it had been the monitors which had saved her both times.

E-One was controlled chaos when she got there, thick with the previous evening's casualties—Christmas season notwithstanding—and operating with a fifth of its facilities and staff quarantined. She threaded her way through the lobby, towards the module's airlock, thinking how deceptively easy it seemed to bust out of the MedCenter through here; just slip past the rushed medicos and nurses, out across the ambulance bay, through the portals and onto First Avenue and freedom. She'd tried that one New Year's Eve when a happy midtown riot had put everyone on triple shifts. The barrier sensors had marked her ID as she'd run for the street, and the stasis beams had frozen her in midstride. It had taken a good two days for her nerves to quiet down—the beams were designed to stop a five-ton ambulance moving at fifty kph in under a dozen meters. She hadn't tried that way again.

She glanced at the life function telemeters as she entered the module proper, nodded at their low green profiles; the boy was recovering quickly. Imre Janscer hadn't arrived yet; so she put in a call

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to his midtown apartment to tell him to hurry up. She knew there was no way he could've gotten ready in the few minutes since the E-room had called him, but the opportunity to bait him was too good to pass up; his response was loud and Slavic and very crude, and it brought a tiny smile to her face. The preliminary scans on the boy hadn't arrived either.

He was nice-looking, thinnish with a great shock of red hair above a freckled face. He was developing some pimples, a fresh scab on one cheek showing where he'd picked one away.

"Have we an ident on him yet?" she asked no one in particular. The voice on the com answered, a young, serious-faced medico whose ID marked him as DR ANDREW WHELAN MD (SR). Her first guess about him had been wrong; he was a senior resident, not an intern.

"His name's Robert Craig; we got it from the sitter. We're getting his history through the PDB." In a lower voice, he added, "His father's with the UN. . ."

"I know, the *Troubleshooter.*" she replied, adding the nickname the *Daily News* had given the UN's roving Under Secretary-General. She glanced at Whelan's slate, frowning as she noted the boy's psi-rating, her eyes flicking over the telemeters, back to the slate; he was a high-five, just entering puberty. She caught a pair of interns staring at her bare legs, scandalized yet intrigued, so she stared them down.

"Data's coming in, Doctor." Andy said.

"My name's Petra. I'm afraid I despise hospital formality almost as much as Dr. O'Conner thrives on it." Andy gave a quiet laugh and relaxed, easily adapting himself to Petra's regime. Her hand reached out and opened a line to Ward 7, her psiward, ten levels above E-One. "Are you copying, Chu?"

"We're copying, Petra," Chu answered, and Petra let it go at that; Li Chuien-Tzu was her senior psimed, by simple virtue of the fact that he was the only other stripped-psi in the Hospital Corporation, besides herself, who'd lived past his "forty" and even then his forty-two months came nowhere near her eight years. They worked well together, understood and trusted each other, needed each other as much as one stripped-psi dared need another. Eventually, one of them would successfully suicide, and then life would not be pleasant for the survivor.

But that was future, even if only a second away; present

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was Robbie Craig and equally demanding.

She watched the data flash on the module's massed scan-screens, collecting the print-outs as they rolled free of the computer terminal; she checked the readings twice, then ordered another series of tests. The boy's life functions had stabilized in middle-green by then, and the life support cell had been keyed into a STAND-BY/MONITOR mode.

"Andy," she asked, "how does the sitter read?"

Andy glanced at a scan-screen, called for some readings, and said, "Everything checks out green and nominal, Petra; she's all right."

"She awake?"

"Uh-huh. Gonna talk to her?"

"Yeah, keep an eye on Robbie here. Oh, what's the sitter's name?"

"Madeline Fry."

Madeline Fry was a small woman, only a few centimeters taller than her charge and about as thin. Her bone structure made her that way, though; her body was well-fed and healthy. She had brown hair, browner eyes, a pleasant face; she looked in her middle forties, an open woman worried about the boy. She wore a cross, Catholic, and she was married.

"Ms. Fry?"

The other woman's eyes flicked over her quickly, taking in everything, and the shock at Petra's appearance filled her eyes instantly. A hospital like this was for decent people, not something off of West 42nd Street.

"Ms. Fry, I'm Doctor Hamlyn; I'm responsible for Robbie's case right now. I'd like to talk to you about him."

"What do you want to know?"

"Has he ever had one of these attacks before? Ever collapsed?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"A few. Five or six, I think; I'm not sure. But never this seriously." Her concern for the boy was obvious; she loved him very much.

"When was the first?"

"Just over a year ago; yes, it was the week before Christmas. He'd been playing outside the chalet—oh, you wouldn't know; it's Professor Craig's house in Zermatt, Switzerland"; Petra nodded. "Well, all of a sudden, he collapsed. He'd never done anything like that before; he'd never had a sick day in his whole life. I took him to Zurich, but the doctors there said there was nothing physically wrong with him, that he'd probably overexerted himself or something."

Petra tapped her pencil against her slate, a nervous tap,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

feeling the room with the ragged edges of her once powerful psi-sense. She'd been a Hallam-nine, a high-nine—full telepath—before Sam's death; now she could barely register strong, basic emotional waves in close proximity to her. And she was damned lucky to have that; most stripped-psis lost their entire faculty.

The boy had been collapsing for over a year, without detectable physical cause; his physical stats from the E-One sensors showed an acute muscular degeneration compared with the PDB tapes of his last physical examination, a year ago. Yet Siebert's, untreated, killed in six months, eight at the outside.

"Did you take him to a psiward for a checkup?"

"Yes, the one in Chicago, the Braekman Clinic." Of the University of Chicago; Petra'd never been there, but she'd seen holograms. It wasn't as good as her ward. "The doctors there couldn't find anything wrong, either; they wanted Robbie to come back for another series of tests, but we never had the chance."

"How so?"

"Well, Robbie's father travels a great deal, and he likes to have his family with him, especially Robbie. Besides, the attacks stopped last September, just after we got to Peking. We all thought he'd gotten over it."

A siren kicked off in the next room, and Petra was through the portal in an instant. Andy and two others were working over the boy's chest, Andy straddling him and trying to regain the heart's normal beat by manual stimulation while the others set up the electric stimulator and primed hypos of adrenalin and pythrombin; the cardiac telemeters were flat, heartbeat gone, the siren still announcing the emergency.

"Look out, Petra, this is gonna get messy!" Andy snapped and Petra backed out of the way as a surgical table was pulled up to the bed and Andy's team cracked the boy's chest. They had him plugged into the life support cell's artificial heart inside of two minutes, before moving quickly and efficiently to get the boy's undamaged, supposedly healthy heart going again.

A half hour later, without warning, Robbie's heart restarted itself and was soon up to a normal, healthy beat, acting as if nothing had happened. Andy didn't close off the support cell's junctions, though; the sudden stoppage, the arbitrary restart after all surgical attempts had failed, had rattled him.

"Neuronic failure?" Petra asked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Looks like it. I think we should put him on full life support; his diaphragm might go next, his glands, hell, his entire neurological system for that matter. I don't think we'll be this lucky again."

"Any ideas why?"

Andy smiled thinly, catching a piece of bubble gum thrown by one of the nurses. "That's your field, Doctor; mine's just keepin' 'em alive for you psimed types to play with. For what it's worth, though, I'd put my money on a synapse blockage, massive and selective. And malignant."

"When you called me you said it was Siebert's." she mused.

"Yeah, that's what I thought then. But he's been alive too long, and this thing's deviating too much from the taped patterns. Distant relation, maybe, but not Siebert's."

"Um."

There was a quiet tap from the observation level, and they turned to see Max Hochman slip into one of the chairs, bracing his twisted left leg on an old, well-used cane. He was a tall man, a fraction under two meters, and he carried himself with a rolling grace that effectively disguised his limp; he was a strong man, yet surprisingly gentle, using his strength and iron will only in defense of the dozen-odd stripped-psis placed in his care by the Hospital Corporation. Officially, he was a Senior Psychiatric Consultant to the Department of Psionic Medicine, NYHC; to his stripped-psis he was father-confessor, or just father; one who would listen to them cry and almost understand.

Only two of his psis kept barriers between themselves and Hochman; Chu and Petra; Chu because that was the way he'd always been with people, Petra because it hurt too much. She'd known Max most of her life, long before she and Sam were married, and he reopened wounds that had never really healed, punished her carefully built defenses more than she could bear; so she erected a wall between them, content to smile formally and call him friend, no more.

"Good morning, Petra, I came over as soon as I heard about the boy. How is he?" The intercom roughened his voice a little, making it sound more clipped and precise than usual; he'd grown up in Tel Aviv, done his internship and resisidency at the Weitzman Institute, and it still showed when he talked, even after forty years.

"Not good. He's got a malignant neuronic, distantly related to Siebert's and terribly virulent." Petra hunched herself away from him, avoiding his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eyes, examining instead the print-outs of the latest test runs. They weren't good. "It also seems impervious to all the established treatments."

"What's his rating?"

"High-five according to his card."

"How does he 'sound'?"

Petra looked at him for an instant, then at the boy, pale under the sterile green toweling that hid the junctions binding his body to the support systems. "I don't know yet, Max. Imre hasn't arrived and there are no other consultant psis available." Her voice dropped, and she was talking more to herself than Max; he had to strain to hear her. "His heart's stopped twice; there has to be some brain damage. And he's got a neuronic; it's proven fact that neuronic diseases attack the psi faculty first, invariably destroying it or crippling it beyond repair."

"We might be lucky this time; he's in good hands."

She touched some controls on the computer console, and the print-out terminal beside Hochman began chattering. "Tell me some more fairy stories, papa."

Max's head came up, and he watched her intently for a few moments, a frown adding long creases to his face; it had been months since he'd heard her speak so bitterly, or seen her this tense. He made a note to review her last week's monitors as soon as he got the chance.

"Are you going to try a penetration?" he asked her.

"I don't know yet. This thing seems to be building to a total neurological collapse; if that happens with one of my people inside his mind, we'll lose both of them. We may lose the boy anyway. Hell, Max, the computers won't even give me a probability read-out, it's that close."

"And yet, a penetration is essential if we're to save the boy's life."

She smiled without humor. "Damned if we do, damned if we don't, just like always. Andy, have his parents been notified?"

"Yeah, on admission. His pere's downtown at UNO, some big conference; he said he'll be up as soon as he can and that we should contact him if there's any change."

"Hm. And his mother?"

"In Westport, their East Coast residence, very, very chic." At Petra's angry glare, he dropped his act and continued. "We asked NYPD to send a 'foil, as they live on the Sound, and she should be here in an hour or so."

"Okay. Max," she called, and the psychologist looked up from his slate, "I'm setting a conference call for seven this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

evening, with OR slotted for nine if it's a green light; that way everyone involved'll have a chance for some rest this afternoon. All right?"

"Fine. I think you have decided already, Petra. Not so?"

She gestured towards the pile of computer flimsies Max was studying. "Robbie's eleven years old, Max, and it's almost certain he'll lose his psi if he lives, which is doubtful. Would it be that beneficial to WHO and mankind if we force this boy to live another few years 'in the service of Man,'" Her voice spat out each word, taut with anger, as she quoted the new motto of the World Health Organization. "Before he suicides like the rest of us. You know how hard it is to send a stripped adult through therapy; what d'you think it'll be like for a boy just entering puberty? It's not right, Max."

"Perhaps not right, Petra, but necessary. Are you shifting him up to the psiward?"

She nodded, letting her anger of a moment before flow out of her, aware of Andy's eyes on her, concerned and wanting to help. "As soon as his condition stabilizes and the crowd outside thins enough to give us a clear run to the lifts. Chu's setting up an LS module in Bravo. Shouldn't be long now."

"Good. Have you eaten yet?" She shook her head. "Come, join me for breakfast." She started to object, but he waved her protests aside. "There's nothing you can do here that Doctor Whelan cannot do better, and you'll think much more efficiently on a full stomach. Besides, a pretty face is just the thing one needs to counteract a dreary Monday morning. Come."

Petra shrugged in resignation and was halfway to the airlock when a sudden thought pulled her around. "Andrew, is the quarantine still necessary?" her voice was alarmed.

Surprised, he looked at one of the scanscreens. "No, everything's green and nominal; the disease isn't contagious."

She straightened to her full height, very formal and very cliche-British as she had the last word. "I do hope, Doctor, that your machines know what they are about."

With that, she was gone, a ripple of laughter following her through the lock. The emergency ward was still in varying degrees of chaos, depending on one's perspective—Andy thought this was an average day's load—but the crowd was easing up. Max led her towards the lifts, watching her out of the corner of his eye, silent until they were inside and alone; he punched for Level

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

20-East, the Senior Staff Lounge.

They talked all through breakfast, Max trying to find out the cause of her tension, Petra dodging him by shifting their conversation back to her favorite topic, theater. The Shakespeare Festival came to the MedCenter occasionally, doing their shows in the Cornell auditorium, and there would be a rare performance by a Broadway company, usually avant-garde and needing the publicity. Petra had never been to a Broadway theater, or an Off-Broadway one, though she'd loved the West End with a sidetracked actress's passion; even in those days of cheap-cheap trans-Atlantic fares, she'd never gotten round to visiting the States, preferring to hitch through Europe and the Near East, plus one long jaunt down through the African Union. She and Sam had planned a trip to New York as a busman's holiday, but then he'd died and everything had changed.

She let Max pry in his gentle, indirect way for about forty minutes before excusing herself and heading down and across the MedCenter to her psiward; Robbie was plugged into his Life Support Cell, all telemeters steady and green. Chu was bent over a computer console, plotting out a penetration curve, anticipating a green light from Petra, that would guide one of her stripped-psis into Robbie's mind to try and neutralize the neuronic disease. That was the irony of being stripped, the irony that made them so valuable to WHO. As a compensation for the loss of a strong psi-faculty, nature granted the power to heal other crippled minds, a talent that could reach into places that normal empathic healers, even Taus, could not reach and survive. Many felt the empathic gift worth the sacrifice; none of those were stripped.

There were three other psimeds on duty, plus a half dozen nonpsis, barely handling the fifty-plus patients sent to New York from all over the eastern United States. She walked over to the nurse's station and ran her eyes over the statboards, noting the readings, satisfied. She reached for a phone and called the main desk, inquiring about Robbie's parents. His father was still in his meeting, and his mother was still on Long Island Sound, though the 'foil was making good time.

"Petra," called Danny Maier, one of her senior psimeds, a good, experienced man, but he had less than six months left of his "forty." "The boy's waking up."

"I thought you gave him a sedative."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I did, but he's canceling it out. See for yourself." One of the telemeters was showing an active, jagged line as his body threw off the effects of the Triptine that Danny had injected. "He'll be awake in a few minutes."

It was nearly ten minutes before Robbie's eyes opened, glazed first as they roamed his cubicle, focusing slowly as he realized where he was. They paused a second on Danny, a few more on Petra, then widened as he caught sight of the support equipment covering his chest and hips. There was a stirring under the covers as he moved his feet a little, rubbed them together. The telemeters marked an increase in his heartbeat and respiration, a little adrenalin leaking into his bloodstream as fear touched the boy, but less than they had expected. He was a good, tough kid.

He rubbed his feet again and Petra put out a hand to stop him, her touch light and cool without being ticklish. "Don't move 'em too much, Robbie," she said, smiling, "some of these connections here are pretty delicate, and they'll hurt a bit if they're pulled free."

"Did. . .did I break my back?"

"No. You had a bad blackout at Radio City, remember?" He looked blank for a second, then nodded slowly. "Well, when you hit the ground, you'd gone through a complete paralysis, no heart, no lungs, no nothing; you almost died. This mess here is designed to make sure you don't."

"I'm going to die?"

"No, you silly goose. And you won't have all this on top of you the rest of your life either, so don't worry about it." He looked relieved as she said it, both of them remembering that he loved outdoor sports, was a damned good skier in his class. "Okay, people, vanish; I want to talk to my young friend alone. You, too, Doctor Whelan, and thanks for helping out."

"My pleasure, Doctor." Andy said as he looked up from the far side of the support cell, making some final adjustments to the cell before leaving. "Hey, Robbie boy, watch out for her; she is one dangerous female." His face and manner were terribly serious as he said this, and Petra replied in kind.

"Terribly oversexed too, I'm afraid." To Robbie now. "You'll just have to bear with me and hope for the best."

Robbie laughed a little, fractionally jiggling the support cell; Petra heard Andy mumble something about sticking around for a few more minutes, but she missed most of it and didn't ask him for a repeat.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So," she said, "how d'you feel, luv?"

"Lousy. I've got a bad headache; can I have some aspirin?"

"Not yet, after we've finished our tests."

His face pinched a little in concentration. "Hey, my mind's all fuzzy."

"Fuzzy?"

"Yeah. I'm a telepath, you know, a Hallam-five." He was proud of his difference, member of a select club of less than a millionth of mankind.

"Five-point-three-one, to be precise."

His face fell a bit; he'd wanted to impress her.

"Now," she continued, firm but very gentle, "how fuzzy?"

"Well, I can't feel much any more. Like, this morning, on the line, I could feel people all around me, how they felt, a little of what they thought. I even picked up some NBC people! But now it's gone. I can't feel anyone hardly, and when I do, they're real faint, like they're miles away. Understand?"

"I understand."

"It's like. . .someone's turning off my eyes and ears, everything, but they're all still there. . ."

"I understand, Robbie." Her hand was cool on his forehead, soft on his face as she wiped away his sudden, disowned tears; he tried to turn away from her but the support cell locked him in place.

"Yeah."

"I do, really. I know just how you feel. I used to be a high-nine."

"A high-nine? A full telepath?" Wonder pulled him back to her and stopped his tears; he'd never met a high-nine before, they were so rare. She nodded.

"A long time ago. Then I had an accident; I lost it."

"But, Petra, I thought that when you lost your. . ." he groped for the word.

"Psi-sense."

"Yeah, when you lost your psi-sense, you died."

"Some do, some don't. We all die eventually, Robbie, luv." But stripped-psis die within forty months, of suicide, because their minds can't stand life without a psi-sense; because, for them, a rainbow-colored, four-d world of unbelievable beauty and sensitivity has become gray and flat, and all they have left is the memory of what was and the knowledge that they can never, ever, get it back again. So rather than exist crippled, the stripped-psi runs for death, seeks it like a religious seeks his God, and finds it much more often.

The boy's face was changing, paling as he began adding bits of information together, com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing up with the correct answers. Outside, the telemeters started climbing towards the red zones as his agitation and fear made themselves felt.

"Petra, have I lost my psi? Is that what happened to me? Why I'm here?"

"You haven't lost anything, Robbie; you won't lose anything. You're just growing up and that does funny things to psis. But you'll be all right."

"I'm scared, Petra."

"Don't be, luv. You'll be fit and out of here in no time."

There was a knock at the cubicle door, a hiss as it was slid open and Danny Maier's face stuck itself inside.

"Petra, his parents are here; they'd like to see you and the boy."

"Petra," the boy's voice was a sibilant, panicked hiss as she bent low to hear him, feeling his pain, helpless to stop it, "I couldn't hear him. I've always been able to hear Dad, from miles away sometimes but always when we're close. But I didn't hear him come in; I can't hear him now! Petra, what's happening. Dad. DAD!" His scream brought his mother in and Petra moved aside to let her comfort her son, motioning Danny back to the telemeter consoles.

Michael Craig, genius of international and interplanetary diplomacy, looked more a part of the cinema than the UN, wearing a hero's face and body with just the right air of tired cynicism to make him human instead of plastic.

"Dr. Hamlyn, I've heard much about you." I'll bet, she thought. His handshake was firm, matching the rough baritone of his voice. If the office weren't largely a figurehead these days, he'd have made an imposing president. Petra waved for Chu to come over and take care of Craig; she had to get back to Robbie. Things were building up inside him too quickly; she had to be there if he broke.

She had no chance. Even as she waved, Robbie's maddened, fear-born scream spiraled into falsetto, piercing every ear and psi in hearing and freezing them where they stood. Petra wasted no time on explanations or courtesy as she pushed Ms. Craig away from her son and fell on top of his writhing, foam-flecked body. There was blood already seeping from the support units as his convulsions pulled them free, blood on his face and chest where his nails had raked deep. She crooned old child songs, love songs into his ear, stroking his face and head, broadcasting love and warmth with every erg her shattered psi-sense could muster; pitifully little compared to what she'd once had to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

command. Part of her cursed long and eloquently, and smiled deep inside her as it caught the shocked backlash of the psis who'd heard her.

Her body was blocking Robbie's fury from his own; so he turned on her, clawed hands ripping her triple-strength lab coat, teeth snapping at her face and neck. A manic lunge almost threw her off him, and there was red on his mouth as he fell back, wetness on her neck.

"Danny," she screamed, her voice barely heard over Robbie's ululations, "DANNY! Triptine, 5cc's; hurry, goddamn it!"

Danny sat on his right side, Petra on his left, and still Robbie managed to rip a fair hole in Danny's lab coat with his teeth. He charged the hypo and shoved the boy's face into his pillow before pressing the drug into his neck, each move calm and unhurried, as calculated as the songs Petra still crooned into Robbie's ears. The convulsions subsided, but not by much. Petra tossed a glance at the bed statboards.

"Another five, hurry."

"Ten cc's, Petra, should we risk it?"

"He's healthy and I want him deep out. You want to sit on him all day, chum?" she asked in exasperation; then, to herself, "Besides, even ten cc's won't hold him all that long."

The second injection did the trick, and soon Robbie's body was limp. Andy Whelan was waiting with a stretcher and the duty surgical team, and they had Robbie inside the psiward OR—designed to handle the results of just this kind of convulsion—and ready for surgery in a matter of minutes. The whole thing, first convulsion to OR, had taken five minutes real time. Petra didn't believe it.

She came back from the OR holding a sterile gauze pad to her throat, hunting for a bandage; the bite wasn't deep, but it was fleshy and bled freely. Her dress was ripped and blood-scored, her back likewise. Chu eased her onto a bed, plugged it into a statboard and began repairing the damage.

"I should've been there, Chu; I knew it was coming; I felt it but I wasn't sure when. I should've been there, with him. But I thought we had time. I thought. . .oh, Jesus! that hurt!"

"Sorry." He finished digging bits of cloth out of a long rake over her left ribs, applied some antiseptic and a bandage, listening as she slipped in and out of shock, rambling yet lucid. "It caught us all by surprise, Pet; don't think about it."

"Chu, it's gone, all of it; he's a stripped-psi. Wide open under the first amendment of the canons."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"If he lives."

"Yeah, if he lives. And then, the first time he tries suicide, regardless of the reason, he joins the club and becomes UN property. An eleven-year-old boy for God's sake. It stinks; it all stinks, Doctor." He nodded sagely and slipped a mild sedative into her arm, easing her off of her braced elbow. "We ought to let him die, Chu," she said quietly.

"What?" It was Craig, shaken by his son's madness, drifting over towards Petra and Chu in time to hear the final moments of her rambling.

"Petra," Danny Maier called from the nurse's station, "OR's calling; the boy's support cell's just blown out, a sixty percent neurological collapse. Mike Hampshire's handling it but it looks very touch-and-go."

Petra said nothing as Chu helped her off the bed and towards the ward entrance; she'd been expecting something like this all morning. Each attack had been progressively worse, crippling more and more basic functions; the next one should be a total collapse, with almost no chance of recovery.

Michael Craig was in front of her, scared, angry.

"What did you mean, we should let my son die. What the hell were you talking about?"

"Huh?" Her voice was unsteady, blurring like her eyes as the reaction to both the attacks and the shots Chu had given her set in hard. She struggled to focus on Craig, hear what he was saying, but only partially succeeded.

"What did you mean about letting my son die, dammit?"

"Mr. Craig," Chu's voice reverberated in her ear, stunning her. But why so close to her, so loud; then she remembered. He wasn't at his computers; he was next to her, holding her up, his face only a few centimeters from hers. That explained it. She felt his arm tight around her waist and tried to snuggle closer to him, put her arms around him. Strange, nothing seemed to be working. "Not now, please; Dr. Hamlyn is in no con. . ."

"I can see her condition, Doctor, but I think I have a right to an explanation."

"She was speaking rhetorically then, Mr. Craig, half out from the Triptine and Serocaine I shot into her system, expressing a feeling echoed by every stripped-psi here. It's bad enough to lose your psi-sense when you're an adult—mature and, you hope, emotionally stable—but to lose it while you're still a child. . ."

"He might get over it."

"He might. Now if you'll excuse me, sir."

Petra came awake as Chu shoved Robbie's father aside,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

struggling to get herself under control before he reached the hall. She'd never heard him speak that vehemently before, even in bed after making love, when they were as open with each other as they ever dared be. There was an undercurrent to his words that chilled her and raised the hackles on her neck.

Outside the ward, she managed to push herself away from him. For a long moment she examined his face, but the mask was back in place, as strong and impenetrable as ever.

"Chu," she said quietly so no one in the hall would hear her except Chu; he heard every word, she made him, "please don't, not now."

"Don't what?" He smiled slightly.

"You know." He did know but nothing showed on his face, and she stifled an urge to claw the mask away as Robbie had clawed her back. "Please, Chu, not now, I need you."

"You don't really; can you make it to the elevators all right?"

"Chu!"

"I'll get back to the diagrams then and calm the boy's father down; we'll need both for the conference. See you then, Petra."

He was gone, as if he'd never been there. It hurt, physically, and her face was chalk white as she wandered down the hall wondering why? What did I do? Or not do? And afraid, terribly afraid, both for him and for herself.

Andy Whelan met her at the lifts, wearing a sweat-stained surgical suit, his mahogany hair plastered to his skull.

"Hi. Hey, Petra, you all right?"

"Fine," she whispered back, very tired, "I thought you were in OR?"

"I was till Hampshire got there. I'm only a resident, lady; what I don't know about surgery'd fill the *Encyclopedia Britannica.* And Mike Craig's boy deserves nothin' but the best, which Doc Hampshire is."

"Cheer up, you're not so bad."

"Thank you. That compliment earns the lady an escort home."

"No, Andy, I'd rather not this time."

"Tough luck. I happen to live in the same neighborhood."

The lift was deserted, but a prior call detoured them up to the Level 40 VTOL pad with some transferees for the Bethesda/Reed MedCenter in DC.

"Was it a bad one?" he asked when they were alone again.

"What?"

"The mauling, was it bad? I've never seen one before."

"You've probably seen worse come through E-One."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No. Never like that."

"It's happened to me before, worse than this; it'll happen again. It comes with the job. Still, one can usually spot it coming, be prepared. Sometimes it's already happened by the time the patient's brought in."

"Did it happen to Chu?"

"Yes. He got hold of a scalpel somewhere in Boston Central—he was a consultant psi there, a Hallam-seven—and he slit his jugular vein, both wrists and the femoral arteries in both legs. Almost killed two nurses who were trying to stop him, before he collapsed; he was about five seconds dead when they locked him onto full life support, and they're still not sure why he lived. Took 'em a fortnight to wash the blood off the walls."

"Christ," Andy whispered, badly shaken. "Did it happen to you?"

Me? Did it happen to me? Did it? I wasn't bleeding when I woke up, though the bed was a mess; I was in a state of mobile, semiaware catatonia—if such a thing is grammatically possible—for over a month. And then I cried, God, I cried.

The lift braked slightly on its descent, and she leaned against the back wall.

"I don't know. I was dead at the time."

He didn't laugh, bless him; surprising how many people do when they hear that line. Is that why I tell it, for a laugh, so that I'll feel hurt and rejected by their callousness.

"Come again?"

"I was dead. My husband was a Hallam-nine; so we had a full meld binding us as well as love. He could be on Luna farside, and I could feel/hear/know him, talk to him, be with him and a part of him. One day some psychotics grabbed him out of St. Luke's in Paris, went to ground somewhere. When he regained consciousness and I heard him call, he was tied up and he was euphoric on pure serenine—where they'd gotten it, I never knew—anyway, it took him four days to die on the drug, and I was with him all the way. Except that he died and I woke up stripped. The Surèté never found his body."

He reached out, stroking the tears away from her cheeks; she smiled and squeezed his hand lightly.

"I'm sorry. Were you much in love?"

She shook her head. "The word doesn't apply, really; we were. Two compatible Hallam-nines. We met in Edinburgh; I was nine, he eleven, and we both knew right then that we were hooked for life. We started sleeping together five years later, living

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

together as soon as I was in university. Marriage only made it a legal bond."

"And since then?"

"I belong to what might best be called a transient community, Doctor; it's difficult to form a lasting or stable relationship with someone who'll probably be dead in forty months."

He said nothing as the lift dropped through the MedCenter, he on one side of the car, she on the other, his eyes slowly, admiringly, moving over her body. She accepted his examination, filing it in the same corner of her mind where she filed the stares her clothes brought her. She knew what he wanted and wasn't surprised when the car stopped on Lower Level 1, the Resident's Quarters, instead of on her level, two further down. The doors opened and he waved for her to pass.

"Resident's Row, ma'am, the perfect place for a jug of bread, a loaf of wine and. . ." he paused for minor effect, "who can say."

Not me, Petra thought, noting the absence of AV monitors in the long, high corridor; she stayed in the car, leaning nonchalantly against the wall.

"It's an honest offer, Petra. Come on." He held out his hand to her.

What the hell, she thought, and took it, stepping outside.

"Dr. Whelan, Dr. Hamlyn," called the intercom, the buff, basso voice of the MedCenter's security chief, "this section of the MedCenter is not monitored by Audio-Visual systems and, as such, is banned to stripped-psis; Dr. Hamlyn, will you please re-enter the elevator and proceed to a monitored area."

"It's all right; I'll see she's all right." There was no answer, and Andy tightened his grip on her hand, angry at security's intrusion. "Suppose she doesn't?"

"Then the corridor will be gassed, Dr. Whelan, and the pair of you will be returned to a Main Level station for detoxification."

Petra squeezed his hand again and pulled him back into the lift. "It's been tried before, Andy; the gas they use is as effective as it is unpleasant."

Once inside, she pressed for Lower 3, leaning on Andy's shoulder while the car dropped the twenty meters to the stripped-psi living area, a large, basically self-sufficient collection of two-, three- and four-unit cubicles with a well-equipped rec room and cinema. They were the best quarters the MedCenter had to offer, and they had the capability to supply almost every want and desire the stripped-psis could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

come up with. Except freedom and death.

Petra's seniority had given her a four-unit cubicle—bedroom/fresher, kitchen, and study grouped in a half circle around a sloppy, comfortable living room. It was painted in soft, forest shades, tastefully and exotically furnished—some of the pieces made by her brother at Copernicus City from lunar synthetics and metallics brought in from the Belt—the kind of flat that would bring a six-, possibly seven-figure price in a Central Park whitestone. For some, a perfect place to live.

She tensed slightly as they entered, her eyes going to the trio of monitors that covered the living room, splitting as she and Andy moved, one taking care of him, two of her. She still resented other people intruding on her love-making; she considered herself a free woman, yet making love knowing that she was being watched and recorded while she did made her feel unclean, a leper.

She felt Andy reach through the tears in her coat and dress lightly stroking her back as he swung her around, held her close to him, whispering nonsense words in her ear like she'd done to Robbie. She reached round him and pulled him closer, and they stood there a long moment, swaying a little as their body rhythms merged, the two of them communicating on a deeper, more expressive level than words.

He took his time with her, she with him, savoring each moment as it passed, and they were both satisfied as they lay together on the bed, her head cradled on his chest, lightly asleep while he played with her hair. She was dimly aware of him through the soft darkness that enfolded her, aware of the pain from the cuts Robbie had inflicted—though even they felt good now—but the dreams were coming quickly, mercilessly, and she had to let herself go with them.

For the first time in years, she dreamt of the last days of Sam's life, of a call from Interpol in Paris that told her Sam had been taken. She remembered the hours stretching into days stretching into centuries as he retched in his serenine euphoria, his body rotting around him as his mind reached golden, Olympian heights, every foulness becoming a work of purest art, she retching with him, reaching with him, different only in that she fought, thrusting her mind into his in a desperate effort to break him free of the killer drug. She saw him take his memories of her, his awareness of her, the part of her that was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

always with him, and twist it to fit his madness, twist it until it was no better than the filth he lay in, laughing all the while, she laughing with him and crying at the same time, screaming at the futility of her strength.

She won in the end, when it was far too late, when he was so far gone that his bones were brittle sticks under translucent skin. She wrenched him free, and the cry he gave when he realized what had been done to him, what he had done to her, nearly killed her. He lacked the strength to make her leave his mind, and he knew that free of the drug he might live a few more days; he also knew that, in her effort to save him, Petra's body had undergone a sympathetic degeneration until it was in no better condition than his own—though her mind was unscarred by the serenine. She would fight to keep him alive as long as possible, and she would die for it. He could not stand that.

So he died then, rather than a few days later.

She woke up screaming, tears thick on her face as she tried to fight her way free of Andy's grasp, not understanding why she was whole when her first waking memory in the farmhouse had been of a soiled, emaciated, near-dead harridan staring out of the mirror at her, a thing with no psi. None at all.

It took a while for her to calm down, and she was shaking when it was all over. Andy pulled the bed's eiderdown off the floor, where they'd pushed it when they'd slipped into bed a long two hours ago; it was a heavy, soft thing, handmade in one of the Slavic European states for export, and it was warm as he rolled Petra on top of him and pulled the eiderdown over the two of them. All the while he kept up the nonsense songs, using his voice and his body to calm her, bring her back from her dream.

"Thanks," she said as she regained control of herself, stretching—wincing a little as the bandages protested her movement—and kissing him on the lips; he kissed her back and when their heads moved apart, he was on top of her, their hands playing lightly across each other's bodies.

"You all right?"

She smiled and moved under him, pulling him down and in. "Better than I've felt in a long time. You know, Doctor, you're a helluva lot different in bed than you are on the phone."

"I'm afraid I'd just interrupted Angie O'Conner at a very delicate moment." Petra started laughing then, and the rhythm of her laughter set

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Andy off, and they rolled around the bed in hysterics, going from impish tickling to a full-fledged pillow fight as they recreated the morning scene at O'Connor's Long Island house.

Out of breath, Petra collapsed back onto the bed, Andy diving on top of her for another long kiss.

"You know, m'man, you're pretty good at this."

He ran his hand down her body, smiling, a little embarrassed. "Just doing what comes naturally, I guess."

"Not this, klutz! I'm talking about the way you handled my seizure. Damn few people, even trained medicos, would've handled it that well; most of 'em would've called for security help." She pointed to the AV monitors, unashamedly focused on their naked, sweating bodies. "Had any psimed training?"

"No, I opted out during my internship and spent an extra six weeks in diagnostics."

"Want to try it?"

"Huh?"

"You're a natural psimed, a good one; I could use you in Ward 7."

His hands were playing with her again, playing well. "Can't say as I object to the fringe benefits."

She tensed instantly. "Don't be a bloody fool; this time tomorrow I could be dead."

"Bullshit! You're about as eager to die as I am, and I want very much to see my great-grandchildren."

"It's not that simple; a psi-suicide urge has nothing to do with choice. It's totally subconscious, on a basic personality level, and irresistible."

"I wonder. If the urge is so irresistible, how come you're not four years dead by now?"

"I'm a freak. It happens. Johnny Picieri thinks it's something to do with my being a Hallam-nine; the only other stripped-nine alive is Hirokashu in Tokyo, and he's two years past his 'forty.'"

"See."

"Doesn't prove anything; there are three stripped-nines on record who suicided right after their 'forty.' There just isn't enough data for a proper curve."

"Um." He shrugged. "If you can swing it with Kybachevsky, I'm yours to command."

"Done." Mindful that the Chief of Medicine, MSC, might not be alone in his office, Petra pulled a sheet over her body before punching a call to his office. The screen cleared and Emmanuel Kybachevsky's bearded craggy face filled it.

"Hullo, Manny, got a minute?"

"For you, I've got a minute. By the way, is that Andy Whelan's rump I see trying to hide behind you?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She felt Andy wince as she laughed. " 'Fraid so. Why?"

"Angie O'Conner's after his scalp, something about phone calls on her morning off, et cetera; and security wants him docked for attempting to contravene the canons. . ."

"Yeah, he tried to smuggle me into Lower 1."

"Good for him, though he should've known better. Now, what can I do for you?"

"Can you second Andy to Ward 7 for extensive duty?"

"Why? I'm told he's very good down in E-One."

"He's a natural psimed, a good one; he has all the right instincts, and he's not afraid to follow them. And we both know how much I need psimeds."

"And how badly I need doctors. All right, you can have him. I'll notify administration and Picieri. A favor, though?"

"What?"

"Let me have him on temporary status if things downstairs get terribly hairy some night; he's very good with a scalpel."

"Done."

She walked into Conference Room 10/1, Level 10, alone, Andy having started his official psimed duties by running additional tests on the now comatose Robbie Craig. The boy's condition had been steadily deteriorating since his seizure as the disease attacked one area of the brain after another, once coming frighteningly close to overloading the life support equipment—something the module's designer/builders guaranteed was impossible.

The room wasn't crowded, Johnny Picieri—her immediate superior in the corporation hierarchy—Chu, the Craigs, Max; she stiffened as she saw the sixth person. Douglas Heron, NorAm coordinator for the World Health Organization, her control, final arbiter of her—and of every other stripped-psi in North America—destiny.

She said nothing as she sat down and arranged her papers in front of her.

Petra spoke first, slowly, quietly, as emotionlessly as possible, presenting her case for euthanasia. No penetration. The boy was too far gone, his physical condition too unstable to risk a psimed; there were definite indications of brain damage—loss of coordination, paralysis on the left side—possible retardation, a strong possibility that he was psychotic, that the loss of his psi had produced a trauma severe enough to imbalance him. She laid out her points like a general marshaling his armies, and when she'd finished, she felt that she had made a strong case.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Except that things began to go wrong. Chu began attacking her findings, the reasoning behind them, cutting away at her like a chess computer mashing a bad novice. He said things that were half true, which made her points lies, and the Craigs believed him because they wanted to. Max hit her from a different front, bringing up her aberrant behavior of the past few days—her baiting of Imre Janscer that morning was only one example—the reports and analyses of the monitors, both human and computer. All added up to a feeling that Petra was, for the present, a little unbalanced herself, definitely not completely rational. And finally, there was Chu's exhaustively comped-out thirty-eight percent possibility of cure with an immediate penetration, immediate being no later than twenty-two hours this date, ten o'clock.

"I will not clear a penetration. The odds are too great."

"One in three, Petra?" Max asked, concern narrowing his eyes. "We've penetrated before with worse odds, much worse. Just a few years back, you saved the Sierpi boy when the computers gave you a minus probability, almost zero as I recall."

"Robert's physiological condition is too unstable. An hour ago he had another neuronic seizure, and it damn near blew out his support cell, and we all know the SRM guarantees on their support cells. It's too dangerous."

"I'm prepared to take the risk," Chu said softly.

"No!" Petra's negative slapped across the table like a pistol shot, and, for a moment, there was no sound. None at all. A quick smile touched Petra's lips and was gone as she remembered an old line about angels passing overhead; she hoped it was one going to care for Robbie.

Heron broke the silence, one word, to Picieri. "John?"

Johnny Picieri was by his favorite toy, the computer terminal, and he had some sheets of flimsy all ready for Heron's request. "The computer seems to agree with Dr. Li; its opinion is that a penetration would be risky, but that the possibility of effecting a complete cure—or as complete as can be hoped for under the circumstances. . ."

"How complete is that, Johnny?" Petra murmered loud enough for all to hear; Max scribbled some more notes.

"Ah, well, as you said, Petra, there has probably been some brain damage, necessitating remedial therapy, and there will be some loss of motor coordination, but nothing serious and nothing incurable."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Worth the risk, John?" Heron asked.

"Yes, worth the risk."

"So far, it looks two to one against you, Petra." Heron said. "How about you, Max?"

"I'm afraid I must side with Petra, Douglas. I think the boy is too far gone and the risk is too great. I'm sorry."

"Up to me then, isn't it." Heron thought a moment, fingering his half-smoked Havana cigar while he made his decision. "I agree with Dr. Li; the penetration should be attempted."

Michael Craig nodded a deep thank you to his old friend as his wife burst into tears; Petra pushed herself to her feet, gathering Robbie's file from Chu before heading downstairs for some study and meditation before the penetration.

Heron's voice stopped her. "No, Petra, you'll not handle this one." And Chu held his hands out for the file, a supernally calm expression on his face. Their eyes locked a moment, and Petra saw behind the mask, saw the pain and longing she knew was mirrored in her own. He turned to go, and she tried to call out to Max or Heron, but no sound left her throat. She wanted so badly to make this penetration, and she knew that her reasons, like Chu's, had little to do with saving the boy's life.

She turned to Heron, a question on her lips, and the slim administrator looked, in turn, at Max.

"The computers," he said, clearing his throat, "feel that we should be especially careful with you over the next fortnight or so, Petra. You've been dreaming of the farm again—a very bad index—and your chart shows a strong emotional regression over the past few days; and, this afternoon, you had that nightmare/sensoral of Sam's death. Every index we've been able to gather points to a suicide urge in the next few days; whereas Chu's slate is quite stable, showing only the usual mild disturbances. I really wouldn't be that surprised if he outlived you, Petra, no harm meant."

She nodded and left them, beaten once again, knowing they were wrong and unable to do anything about it.

Robbie Craig died the next morning, time of death officially listed as 2457:18.9hrs. Chu had tried everything he'd ever learned, every procedure, trick, stratagem, improvising—brilliantly—on the spot; anything to arrest the terminal deterioration of Robbie's neuronic system. Johnny had tried to call him back once the situation had become hopeless; one of the consultant psis had tried to pull

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him back, without any success. Chu was as stubborn as he was brilliant. He stayed and fought until the shell he had penetrated collapsed around him and died, Robbie's shattered, psychotic mind running for the dark it hungered for. And Chu followed him, scant seconds behind. Robbie's life support cell went out first, blown and fused by the boy's complete physiological collapse; Chu's went much later, after Johnny had finally admitted defeat and declared Chu dead. He'd flicked a switch and the unit had died, taking Chu's body with it.

Robbie's body was taken downstairs for an immediate autopsy, prior to removal to a suitable funeral home. Chu's was sent down for cremation.

Petra went to bed alone that night, locking her outer door. But Andy got an override key from Johnny Picieri, and he slipped in after witnessing Chu's cremation, mixing himself a badly needed hot rum in her kitchen before pulling a chair over beside the bed to wait for her to wake up.

She was in a mild nightmare, tossing and moaning an eerie, keening wail that chilled his spine. She was mumbling, too, but he could only pick out one word, *sonderkommando*, repeated over and over again. He sipped his rum and edged the chair as close to the bed as it would go.

He was there, asleep, empty rum mug in his lap, when Petra's eyes opened just after sunrise. She was glad he was there, though she never told him, almost refused to recognize the thought in herself; and when she let herself drift back to sleep a few minutes later, his right hand was cradled in hers, a smile on her face.

Only the monitors were left then, and they kept watch, as they always did, silent and omniscient.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An arclight is a B-52 strike, and here is a good story that uses the Indochina war as background for something quite different but no less chilling. David Drake writes: "I am 27, married, just hired as the assistant attorney for the town of Chapel Hill. As is fairly obvious from the story, I served with the Eleventh Cav in Cambodia and Viet Nam; but as an interrogater rather than a tanker."

Arclight

by DAVID DRAKE

GRUNTING AND SNARLING, the nineteen tracked vehicles of G Troop struggled into a night defensive position. From the road watched a family of impassive Cambodians. The track commander of the nearest vehicle, three-six, waved at them as his ACAV shuddered through a thirty-degree arc and prepared to back into its position in the laager. Red paint marked the track's flat aluminum sides with the name "Horny Horse" and a graphic parody of the regiment's stallion insignia. None of the stolid, flat-faced onlookers gave any sign of interest, even when the ACAV lurched sideways and began to tilt. The TC leaned out of his cupola in the middle, vainly trying to see what was the matter. Jones, the left gunner, looked out over the hole opening under the tread and waved frantically, trying to shout over the engine noise. The TC nodded and snapped to the driver through his intercom, "Whip 'er right and gun 'er, Jody, we're falling into a goddamn bunker!"

The diesel bellowed as Jody let the left clutch full out and tramped on the foot feed. The ACAV slewed level again with the left tread spitting mangled vegetation behind it. "Cut the engine," the TC ordered, and in the sudden silence he shouted to the command track in the center of the rough circle of vehicles, "Captain Fuller! We're on a bunker complex!"

The shirtless, sweating officer dropped the can of beer he was starting to open and grabbed his dirty M-16. No matter what you did, clean your rifle daily and keep it in a case, the choking dust kicked up by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the tracks inevitably crept into it at the end of a day's move. And if they really were on a bunker complex, the move wasn't over yet. Everybody knew what had happened to E Troop last November when they laagered on an unsuspected complex and a dozen sappers had crept out inside the NDP that night.

The hole, an irregular oval perhaps a foot along the greater axis, looked uncompromisingly black against the red laterite of the bare ground. Worse, the tilted edge of a slab showed clearly at the back, proving the cavity below was artificial. Everybody knew the dinks had been building bunkers here in the Parrot's Beak for twenty years and more, but the captain had never seen a stone one before.

"Want me to frag it?" someone said. It was the red-headed TC of the track that turned the bunker up, Fuller saw. Casely, his name was. He held his unauthorized .45 in one hand, cocked, and a pair of smooth-hulled fragmentation grenades in the other.

"Gimme one of them," growled Sergeant Peacock, reaching his huge black arm toward the younger soldier. Casely handed one of the grenades to the field first and watched him expertly mold a pound and a quarter stick of plastic explosive around it. The white explosive encased all the metal except the handle and the safety pin in a lumpy cocoon. "We'll try a bunker buster first to see if anybody's home," the sergeant said with satisfaction. "Better clear back." He pulled the pin.

All around the laager, men were watching what was going on beside three-six. Nobody was keeping a lookout into the jungle; but, then, the dinks didn't hit armored units in the daytime. Besides, the dozen Cambodians were still squatting in the road. Intelligence might be wrong, but the locals always knew when there was going to be trouble.

Peacock sidled closer to the hole, hunching down a little at the thought that a flat brown face might pop up out of it at the last instant, eyes glaring at him behind the sights of an AK. He gagged and blinked, then tossed the bomb the last yard with a convulsive gesture and darted back away.

"Jesus H. Christ!" he wheezed, "Jesus H. Christ! That stinks down there like nothing on earth!"

"How's that?" Fuller snapped, nervous about anything unusual. The bunker buster went off, a hollow boom like a cherry bomb in a garbage can, only a thousand times as loud. Dirt and whizzing frag-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ments of stone mushroomed upward, drifting mostly toward three-six and showering it for thirty seconds. The crew covered their eyes and hunched their steel pots close to their shoulders. Captain Fuller, kneeling beside the track under the unexpected rain of dirt, suddenly choked and jumped to his feet swearing. "My god," he roared, "which way's the wind blowing?" The charnel reek that oozed out of the newly opened bunker was strong and indescribably foul. The troop had found NVA buried in the jungle for months in the damp warmth, found them and dug them up to search for papers; that stench had been nothing to this one.

"Must'a been a hospital," Sergeant Peacock suggested as he edged upwind of the pit. He was covering his nose with an olive drab handkerchief. "Jesus," he repeated, "I never smelled anything like that."

Three-six's diesel ripped back into life and brought the track upwind of the hole in a wide circle. Ten yards away, its nose pointing out toward the road beside the next vehicle over, it halted and Casely descended again. He still held his pistol. "God, look at that," he said.

When the bunker buster had blown, it lifted the roof off a narrow crypt some ten feet long and half that wide. It could not have been more than inches below the surface of the soil at any point. Relatively little of the rubble kicked up by the explosion had fallen back into the cavity, leaving it open to the eyes of the men on its edge. Most of the litter on the floor of the crypt was of bones. All were dry, and many had been smashed to powder by the blast. One skull, whole by some mischance, goggled toward the north wall.

The idol glared back at it. It was about six feet high, cut out of streaky soapstone instead of the omnipresent laterite whose pocked roughness forms the walls and ornamentation of most Cambodian temples, even those of Angkor Wat. Though it stood on two legs, there was nothing manlike about the creature. A fanged jaw twisted into a vicious grimace, leering out over the beast's pot belly. One clawed arm rested on the paunch; the other, apparently the only casualty of the explosion, had been broken off at the shoulder and lay half covered by the gravel on the floor. The gray-on-black marking of the stone blended to give the image a lifelikeness it should not have had; Fuller blinked, half expecting blood to spurt from the severed arm. Over all lay the miasma of decay, slowly diffusing on the hot breeze.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fuller hesitated a moment, peering over the edge. "Anybody see a door to this place?" he asked. None of the group slowly gathering on the edge of the crypt answered. The whole room had been faced with thin slabs of the same stone that formed the idol. Line after line of squiggly, decorative Cambodian writing covered their surface unintelligibly. Fragments from the roof of the crypt showed similar markings.

"That ain't no hospital," Sergeant Peacock asserted needlessly, wiping his palms on the seat of his fatigues. The light-green material darkened with sweat.

Jody Bredt, the undersized Pfc. who drove three-six, sauntered over with his gas mask in his hand. He took the war a little more seriously than most of the rest of the troop and kept his mask in the hatch with him instead of being buried in the bottom of his duffle bag. "Want me to take a look down there, Captain Fuller?" he asked importantly.

"Why don't you just put in for official tunnel rat?" his TC gibed, but the officer nodded appreciatively. "Yeah, go ahead. Be careful, for god's sake, but I think this may just have been an old temple."

Jody slipped his mask on, virtually blinding himself even in the bright sunlight. The lenses were dusty and scratched from knocking around in the track for months. A preliminary sniff had convinced him that the stench had almost dissipated, but he couldn't take the mask off now that he'd made such a production of it. Gingerly, he lowered himself over the edge. Sergeant Peacock knelt down to hold his wrist in case he slipped; there might be a mine under any of the delicately carven slabs. The gooks were clever about that sort of thing. Still, any mines down there should have gone off when the bunker buster did. He let his feet touch the ground with a little more confidence and ran his hand over the wall. "I don't see any swinging doors or anything," he reported. "Maybe they got in through the roof, huh?"

"Hell, we'll never know that now," Casely snorted. "Hey, Captain, I think the smell is pretty well gone. Let me go down there."

"Why?" Fuller grunted. "Want to take that statue back with you on R&R?"

The TC grinned. The captain knew his men pretty well. "Naw, too big. I did think one of them skulls would make kind of a nice souvenir if they don't check my hold baggage too close, though."

Fuller swore and laughed. "OK," he said, squatting down

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

preparatory to jumping in himself, "go ahead, you found the place. But I want the rest of you guys back on your tracks. We're going to be leaving here in five, as soon as I get a look around myself."

"Hey, Red, throw me something," one of the bystanders begged Casely, but the captain waved him away peremptorily. "Go on, goddamnit, I don't want all of you hanging around here in case the dinks are out there." He hopped down into the cavity, joining Casely and the driver whose mask hung from his hand again. The air was thick but had lost the earlier noisomeness.

Casely picked up the skull he wanted for a trophy with a finger through each of the eye-sockets. When he had lifted it waist high, the bone crumbled to powder. What was left of the skull shattered unrecognizably when it hit the floor. "Goddamn," the TC swore, kicking angrily at the heap of dust, "why didn't it do that when the frag went off if it had to do it at all? Now I got my hopes up and look what happens!"

Peacock, squatting like a black Buddha on the rim of the crypt, chuckled deep in his chest. "Why, the next dink we get, you just cut his head off and dry it out. How that be, Red? Get you a nice fresh head to take back to your wife."

Casely swore again. The captain was handling another of the bones. This one was a femur, sheared off some inches short of the knee joint. If the frag hadn't done it, the damage dated from the unguessable past. The bone was almost as dry and fragile as the skull that had powdered in Casely's hands. He tossed it up to the field first, shaking his head in puzzlement. "How old do you guess that is, sarge?" he asked. "I don't think I ever saw anything that used up before."

"This old guy is still in fine shape," Jody put in, rapping the brutal idol on the nose with his gas mask. "Frag didn't hurt him hardly at all, did it?" He kicked at the broken limb lying near the statue. The others, more or less consciously, had been avoiding the idol with their eyes. If you looked too closely, the crude swirls on the thing that were supposed to represent hair seemed to move by themselves. Probably the grain of the stone.

"Goddamn," Fuller said. It was not entirely blasphemous the way he said it. "Will you look at that."

The driver's foot had shaken the broken arm, paw, whatever out of the pile of rubble in which it lay. Previously unseen was the figure of the man—it was clearly a man—held in the monster's clawed grip. The man

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had been sculpted only a fraction of the size of the thing holding him, some thirty inches or so from foot to where the head would have been if it hadn't been broken off by the blast. Fuller looked more closely. No, the figure had been carved that way originally, limp and headless in the idol's claws. The beast-god's leering mouth seemed to take a further, even more unpleasant dimension. Fuller stretched his arm up to Sergeant Peacock. "Sarge, give me a hand. Come on, you two, we're getting out of here."

"Think the gooks been using this as a hospital?" Jody asked, scrambling up to the surface with a boost from Casely. Jody always missed the last word and didn't have quite the intelligence to supply it himself.

"I don't know what they're doing," Fuller grunted. "If there's one bunker around here, there could be a hundred though, and I'm not sitting around to find out. I think I'll ask for a B-52 strike here. God knows, they're flattening enough empty jungle they ought to be willing to hit a spot like this."

Casely picked up a bit of the crypt's roof and tossed it in his hand. "Hey," he said, "maybe some of those locals speak English. I'd like to know what these squiggles are saying."

"You're going to have to find them to ask," Peacock said with a shrug. "They must'a took off when the bunker buster went off."

"Umm," the redhead grunted. "Well, it makes a souvenir anyway." Around the circle of vehicles engines were starting up. One of the gunners signaled Casely with the radio helmet in his hand. "Come on, Red," he shouted, "we're moving out." Casely nodded and began jogging toward the track. He wasn't sorry to be leaving this place either. Not sorry at all.

Three-six had a full crew of four men, and so they split the guard into two-hour shifts from 2200 to 0600. The new location was a dead ringer for the one they'd just left, low jungle approaching the graveled length of Highway 13, but at least there didn't seem to be any bunkers. Or idols. Casely had last guard, a concession to his rank that meant he could get six hours sleep uninterrupted, but he couldn't seem to drop off soundly. The air was cool and misty, cloaking the tracks so closely that the Sheridan to the left in the laager was almost invisible. A good night for sappers. Casely could almost feel them creeping closer.

He glanced at his watch. Three o'clock, Jody's shift. The TC was stretched out on the closed cargo hatch of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ACAV while the two gunners slept inside on mattresses laid over the ranked ammo boxes. He should have been able to see Jody sitting in the cupola, staring out into the jungle. At first glance the driver wasn't there, and Casely sat up to make sure the little guy hadn't gone and done something unusually stupid. At the first sound of movement from behind him Jody gasped and straightened up from where he was hunched over the cupola's fifty caliber machine gun. "Jeez, Red, it's you. Jeez, you gave me a shock there!" he whispered nervously.

Casely swung himself around to lean his left side on the sloping steel of the cupola and peer out into the night. "Couldn't sleep," he muttered. The rustle of static escaping from the driver's radio helmet was comforting, mechanical.

"I think there's somebody out there," Jody blurted suddenly, waving his arm toward the mist. "I keep hearing something moving, kind of."

Something like thunder began in the far distance. It didn't seem loud until you tried to whisper over it. Unlike thunder, it didn't stop. The rustling, rumbling sound went on and on, and to the west the sky brightened intermittently with white flashes.

Jody tensed. "What the hell's that?" he stammered, his right hand already snaking for the cal fifty's charging handle. His TC chuckled and stopped him. "Christ, you are new," Casely said without malice. "This the first time you heard an Arclight?"

Jody's blank expression was evident even in the gloom. "Arclight," the TC repeated. "You know, a B-52 strike. Hell, that must be ten clicks away at least."

"Ten kilometers?" the driver said in surprise. "It scared me there for a minute."

"If there's any dinks under it, it'll scare them worse," Casely stated positively. "Wait till we go through one of the bombed areas, and you'll see. They just flatten whole swaths of the jungle, a quarter mile wide and as long as there's planes in the strike. Don't leave a thing higher than the grass, either."

He glanced at his watch again and swore. "Look, I got to get some sleep. Wake me up in half an hour, huh?"

"You don't think there's something out there, Red?"

"Hell, I don't know," the TC grunted. "Keep your eyes open and wake me up in half an hour."

There was something pressing down on them from the dark, but it might have been the mist alone. Casely drew his poncho liner closer about him and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fell back into a fitful sleep. He dreamed, aimlessly at first but then of the writing-covered crypt he had stood in that afternoon. He was there again, but the roof had been replaced and the walls were miles high. The idol was waiting for him. Its soapstone jaws grinned, and its remaining arm began to reach out. The stench rolled almost tangibly from its maw.

"Jesus God!" the TC blurted. His head rang with the blow he had given it, lurching uncontrollably against the cupola to get away from his dream. Even awake, the charnel fetor lay heavily in his nostrils. "Jesus," he repeated more softly. If he'd known the sort of nightmare he was due for, he'd have spelled Jody right then at 3:15 and let the driver dream it for him.

It was still pitch dark; dawn and sunset are sudden things in the tropics. The illuminated hands of his big wristwatch were clear at five after four, though, twenty minutes after Jody should have waked him up. "Hey, turtle," he whispered, "I told you to get me up at a quarter of. You like guard so much you want to pull my shift too?"

No answer. Alarmed, Casely peered into the cupola. The light fabric of the driver's shirt showed faintly where his torso covered the receiver of the cal fifty. Despite all his talk about hearing something in the jungle, Jody had fallen asleep.

In the guts of the ACAV, the radio hissed softly. "Come on, Jody," Casely prodded. He put his hand on the driver's shoulder. Jody's body slipped fluidly off the seat, falling through the cupola into the vehicle's interior. One of the gunners snapped awake with a startled curse and turned on his flashlight.

On the back deck of the ACAV, Casely stared at the dark wetness on his hand. For a moment he was too transfixed even to look down into the track, to look down at Jody's torso sprawling in headless obscenity.

Captain Fuller yawned, then shook his head to clear it. "Sure hope we don't have another sapper tonight," he muttered. "Christ, I'm tired."

Sergeant Peacock methodically checked the tent flap, making sure it was sealed and not leaking light from the small yellow bulbs inside. The command track's engine was on, rumbling to power the lights and the two radio sets in the track itself behind the tent. It was midnight and voices crackled as the radio operator called the roll of the vehicles around the NDP.

"Tell the truth," Fuller went on with a grin of furtive embarrassment, "I wasn't sleeping too

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

well last night even before Casely started shouting. Had one hell of a nightmare. Christ, what a thing that was."

"I knew the gooks to do it in Korea," Peacock said, his great brown eyes guarded. "Cut a fella's head off and leave his buddy sleeping right beside him. I guess they figured the story that got around did more good than if they just killed both of 'em."

The officer shrugged impatiently, lost in his own thoughts. "The dream, I meant. You don't expect your own dreams to go back on you over here. Christ, it's not as though we don't have enough trouble with the dinks."

"We moved ten clicks today," the black said mildly, shifting his bulk on his cot. "You were probably right, figuring there was a bunker system off in the jungle where we laagered last night. They'll just be glad we moved outa their hair; they won't chase us."

Captain Fuller wasn't listening. His face was peculiarly tense, and he seemed to be straining to catch a sound from outside the tent. "Who's moving around out there, Peacock?" he said at last.

The field first blinked. "Sir?" he said. The big man stood up, thrust his head through the tent flap, holding the edges of the material close to his neck to block off the light inside. There was nothing, nothing but an evil reek that seemed to permeate the whole area. He pulled back into the tent. "Everything seems all right, sir; they got a radio going in one of the tracks, maybe that's what you heard."

"No, no," the officer denied peevishly, "it was somebody moving around. I suppose it was just somebody taking a piss. Christ, I'm too jumpy to sleep and too tired to think straight when I stay awake. God damn it, I wish July was here so I could take my R&R and forget this damn place."

"Don't let dreams bother you," Sergeant Peacock counseled quietly. "I know about dreams; I had bad dreams when I was a baby, but my momma would wake me up and tell me it was all right, that it didn't mean anything. And that's so, once you wake up. Even that one last night—"

"Look, Peacock," the captain snarled, "what I don't need is a lecture from you on how childish I'm being. Besides, what do you know about what I was dreaming last night?"

"Sorry, sir," the sergeant said with impassive dignity, "I'm sure I don't know what you were dreaming about. I meant my own dream about the idol—you know, the one back at yesterday's first NDP. It was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pretty bad, the thing reaching out for me and all, but I knew it was just—"

The captain was staring at him in terror, all the ruddiness seeping yellowly out of his face. "My God," Fuller whispered. "Dear God, you mean you dreamed that too?" He stood up. The cot creaked behind him and his dog tags clinked together on his bare chest. To his ears, at least, there seemed to be another sound; one from outside.

"God *damn* it!" Fuller shouted. His M-16 lay under his cot, across the double V of the head and center legs. He snatched it out and snapped back the operating rod. The bolt clacked home, chambering a round. With the rifle in his hands and not another word for the sergeant, the captain stepped through the tent flaps. The radio operator glanced through the back of the tent to see what the commotion was about. Sergeant Peacock shrugged and shook his head. Outside the tent they could hear the CO's voice shouting angrily, "All right, who the hell is—"

The voice fluted horribly into a scream, high-pitched and terrified. "My god!" the radioman blurted and jumped back to his seat in front of the equipment. Sergeant Peacock scooped up his holstered pistol and the machete beside it, his right hand brushing the light switch and plunging the tent into darkness. In the track behind him the radios winked evilly as the big noncom dived out into the night.

There was nothing to be seen. The scream had cut off as quickly as it had begun. There was an angry hiss from one of the encircling tracks as somebody sent up a parachute flare. Its chill glare showed nothing more than the black overcast had as it drifted down smokily, moving southward on the sluggish wind. There was a clatter of equipment all around the circle now, men nervously activating weapons and kicking diesels into life. "There!" somebody shouted from the southern curve of the laager. The flare, yellow now, had in its dying moments caught something lying at the edge of the jungle.

"Cover me," Peacock shouted. Pistol in hand, he ran toward the afterimage of the object. Something hard skittered underfoot, not enough to throw him. It was an M-16. He did not pause to pick it up. He pounded heavily between two tracks, out into the narrow strip between laager and jungle torn by the vehicles maneuvering there earlier in the day. He was very close to what the flare had illuminated. "Gimme some

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

light!" the sergeant roared, heedless of the fact that it would show him up to any lurking sniper.

A five-cell flashlight beamed instantly from the nearest track. The light wobbled, then steadied when it found its target. The flat beam lay in a long oval across the thing glimpsed in the flare.

"Sarge, is that the captain?" someone shouted from the track. The radio operator must have told them who had screamed.

"No, not quite," the field first replied in a strange voice. He was looking farther out into the jungle, at the shadows leaping behind the light. "It's only his leg. No, I'm wrong—I think the rest of him's here after all. Jesus, I do hope his family knows an undertaker who likes jigsaw puzzles."

Lieutenant Worthington turned back to an angry soldier, scratching the brown hair that lay close to his scalp. On the card table in front of him were laid three sections of relief map, joined and covered by a layer of clear acetate. "Look, Casely," the officer said with ebbing patience, "I know you're shook; we're all shook. And on top of that, I've got to keep this troop running until they get a replacement for Fuller out here. But I'm not going to send the troop back south to blow up a goddamn idol just because you have bad dreams about it. Besides, look here—" he thrust the map toward the TC, stubby finger pointing a long rectangle shaded in red crayon on it—"the location is off limits since six this morning until Sunday midnight. Somebody else is operating in there, I guess, and they don't want us shooting at each other."

The redhead's hands clenched. "I'm telling you," he grated, his voice tight, "it's coming for us. First Jody, then the captain—hell, what makes you think it's going to quit when it gets Peacock and me? All of you were there."

"Captain Fuller was eaten by a tiger," the lieutenant snapped. "Now why don't you cut the crap and get back to your track?"

"Goddman funny tiger that doesn't leave footprints—"

"So it jumped! Are you going to get out of here, or are you going back to Quan Loi under guard?" Worthington started to rise out of his lawn chair to lend his words emphasis.

For an instant it seemed the enlisted man would hit him; then Casely turned and stalked off without saluting. Well, salutes weren't common in the field anyway, the lieutenant told himself as he went back to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his job of sorting out the mess the captain had left for him.

Under the tarp by the supply track, Sergeant Peacock sat at another card table sipping juice from the five-gallon container there. He looked up as Casely approached. First platoon had gotten back late from a convoy run, and a few of the men were still eating their supper nearby.

"Can't you do something about him, sarge?" the TC begged. His body, under its tan, had an unhealthy hue that the field first noted without comment. The younger man was about to crack.

"Well, I guess he's right," the Negro said without emphasis. "I know what you're thinking, it was a bad dream—"

"The same dream twice in a row!" Casely broke in, "and you had it too." He drew a cup of juice from the container, and the action seemed to steady him. "Jesus Christ, you can't tell me that's just a coincidence, not with the things that happened right when we were dreaming!"

The big noncom shrugged. "So maybe we smelled something," he agreed, "and it made us think about that stinkhole we opened up the other day. It could do that, you know. Maybe some tiger was using the place for a cave and caught the smell from it. The dream don't mean anything, that's all I'm saying. If there's a tiger roaming around, we'll shoot it the next time."

The redhead took a sip of his juice and sloshed it around in his mouth. He grinned wryly. "Sarge," he said, "I almost think you believe that. Even though you know damn well that the only chance for you and me and maybe the rest of the outfit is to blow up that idol before it gets us too. Stands to reason that if we see it dreaming with only one arm and if we blow the rest of it to smithereens, it won't be able to come for us at all."

The sergeant chuckled. "Well, you better hope you're wrong, son, 'cause they aren't going to let us go back and blow that thing up. Be a fine thing if the arvins ambushed us or we ran into a sheaf of our own one-five-fives, wouldn't it?"

"God damn it, how do you stay so calm?" the younger man exploded. Sergeant Peacock looked him up and down before answering, "Well, I tell you, son, when I was about your age in Korea, my platoon was holding a ridge that the gooks wanted real bad. They came at us with bayonets; you know those old Russian ones, seventeen inches in the blade? There was one coming right for me and I swear he was the biggest gook I ever saw, bigger than me even. I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had a carbine with a thirty-round box, and I shot that son of a bitch right through the chest. I mean I shot him thirty goddamn times. And he kept coming.

"I couldn't believe it. There was blood all over the front of his uniform, and he just kept coming. I put the last shot into him from closer than I am to you, and then he stuck his goddamn bayonet all the way through my guts before he died. I said to myself, Mrs. Peacock, your favorite son isn't coming back 'cause the gooks got zombies fighting for them. But I was wrong both times. They fixed me up in Japan and had me back with the rest of the unit before the ceasefire. And that gook wasn't magic either; he was just tougher than anybody else in the world. Since then I just haven't let anything scare me—especially not magic, even when I could see it. That all went out of me when the bayonet slipped in."

Casely shook his head in resignation. "I hope to God you can say that tomorrow morning," he muttered. "And I hope to God that I'm around to hear you." He walked off in the direction of his track.

Bailey and Jones sat in front of the cupola, playing cribbage and keeping a desultory watch on the surrounding jungle. Bailey was driving now that Jody was gone; that meant that only one of the machine guns in back would be manned in a fire-fight. Christ, why should he worry about that? Casely asked himself savagely. "Hey, snake," the others greeted him. The TC nodded. He climbed into the cupola and sighted along the barrel of the cal fifty. It didn't give him the comfortable feeling it sometimes did.

"Say, Red," Jones said, keeping his eyes on his cards, "you been looking kinda rocky. Just for tonight, Pete and I thought we'd cover for you and let you get some sleep."

"No, thanks a lot, man, but no."

"Aw, come on, Red," Bailey put in. "You're so beat you're gonna fall right off the track if you don't get some sleep. Hell, we can't have that happening to a short timer with only twenty-seven days left, can we?"

"Twenty-eight," Casely corrected automatically. God, that close to going home and this had to happen! It would have been bad enough to get zapped by the dinks now, but, hell, you figure on that . . . .

"What do you say, man?" Bailey prompted.

"Sorry, I really do appreciate it. But I'm not going to sleep tonight. I know what you're thinking, but I'm right. If it gets me, it's going to get me awake. That's how it is."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Below the TC's line of sight, Jones caught Bailey's eyes. The driver frowned and gave a shrug. "Fifteen-two, fifteen-four, and a pair for six," he counted morosely.

The sky was beautiful. Cloud streaks in the west broke the brilliant sunset into three orange blades stabbing across the heavens to bleed on a wrack of cumuli. The reflecting wedges, miles high, stood like three keystones of an arch, more stunning than any sunrise could have been. Swiftly they shrunk upward, deepened, disappeared. The same clouds that had made the display possible blocked off the moon and stars utterly. It was going to be another pitch-black night.

Jones stepped around to the cargo hatch and pulled three beers out of the cooler. He handed them up to the TC to open with the church key hanging from the side of the cupola. No pop tops in Nam. Christ, little enough ice, Casely thought as he sipped his warm Pabst. What a hell of a place to die in!

Footsteps crunched on the gravelly soil. Casely's heart jumped as he turned around to find the source of the sounds. Tiger, monster, whatever, the thing could be on you before you saw it in this darkness.

"How's it going?" Sergeant Peacock's familiar voice asked. The TC relaxed, almost able to laugh at his fright. "Not bad till you scared the crap out of me just now."

"You keep cool," the sergeant admonished. He didn't attempt to climb onto the back deck; instead, he stood beside the ACAV, his head a little below the level of its sides. Casely climbed out of the cupola and squatted down beside it to see the big Negro better.

"You could have gone back on the supply bird tonight," Peacock said, his voice low but audible to Jones and Bailey inside the track now as well as to the TC. Casely didn't care. He could live anything down, if he had more than a night or two to live. In normal tones he replied, "Didn't figure that was going to do much good, sarge. We're at least ten clicks away from where we found that thing, right?"

The field first nodded.

"Well, stands to reason that if it can follow us anyways at all, it could just as easy follow me back to Quan Loi. At least here I got a chance." His left hand reached out and patted the heavy barrel of the cal fifty, sticking more than three feet out from the cupola gunshield. "Oh, I know," the redhead went on, "the captain had a gun, and Jody was right here when it got him—but Christ, back at Quan Loi or Di An

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there wouldn't be a goddamn thing between me and it."

The sergeant chuckled without much humor. Casely thought he could see the outline of a machete, buckled onto the pistol belt under the massive bulge of the black's stomach. The only other time the TC could remember Peacock actually wearing the big knife was the evening they got word that the fire base was being hit by everything from one-oh-sevens on down and that the NDPs could expect their share any moment. "Hey, you want a beer?" he questioned. "It's warm, but—oh *Christ!*"

The younger man leaped back into his cupola. "What's the matter?" the sergeant demanded. Then his nostrils wrinkled.

"Flares!" the noncom shouted at the top of his lungs. "Everybody shoot up flares!"

"What the hell?" Jones blurted in confusion as he and Bailey stuck their heads up out of the cargo hatch. The bolt of the cal fifty in the cupola clanged loudly as Casely snatched back the charging handle. Across the laager somebody had heard the sergeant's bellow and obeyed enthusiastically with a pair of white star clusters. They shot up like Roman candles, drawing weird shadows with their short multiple glare and silhouetting Sergeant Peacock himself as he pounded across the dirt toward the command track. A horrible stench lay over everything.

The flares burned out. The sergeant disappeared, black into the deeper blackness. Lt. Worthington lurched into sight at the flap of the command tent, his rifle in his hand. Then the sergeant bellowed, a terrible mixture of hatred and surprise that almost drowned out the hiss of another flare going up. In the cupola of three-six, Casely cursed with effort as he swung the squealing armor around and pointed the big machine gun in across the NDP.

"Red, what in god's name are you doing?" Jones shrieked. The flare popped and began floating down on its parachute. Sergeant Peacock was between three-six and the command track. His bloated shadow writhed across the soil; neither of his feet were touching the ground. Casely pressed down the butterfly trigger with both thumbs. The shattering muzzle blast pocked the sides of the command tent as the red tracers snicked out past it. The stream of fire was whipping almost straight across the laager, a long raking burst endangering everybody in the troop as it lashed the air just over Sergeant Peacock's head. The field first was struggling titanically with nothing at all; his right hand

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

slashed the glinting machete blade again and again across the air in front of him while his left seemed clamped on the invisible something that held and supported him.

The southern sky brightened, flickered. Not another flare, Jones realized, not thunder either as the sound shuddered toward him. Arclight, a strike on the area they had started to laager in two nights back.

All around the NDP men were shouting in confusion. The lieutenant had started running toward the field first, then collapsed gagging as he took a deep breath. Diesels rumbled, but no one else had started shooting. The barrel of Casely's machine-gun was cherry red. You could watch tracers start to tumble in screaming arcs as soon as they left the burnt-out barrel, but the TC continued hosing the air. Sergeant Peacock gave a choked cry; his machete snapped, then dropped from his hand. At the same instant, the cal fifty came to the end of its belt of ammunition and stuttered into silence. The TC's despairing curses were barely audible over the rising thunder of bomb blasts raking the jungle south of them.

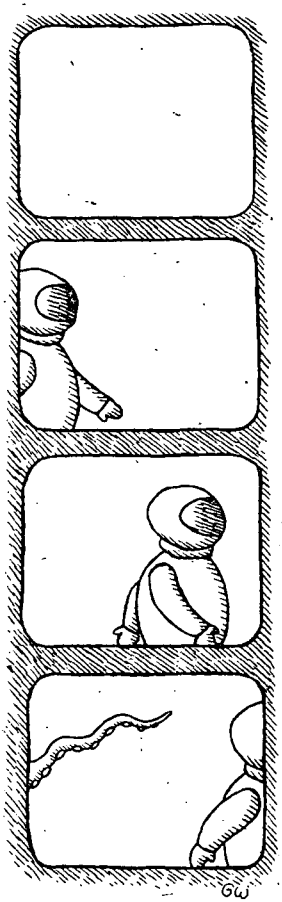
There was an incongruous pop from the air beside Sergeant Peacock. The field first dropped to the ground, unconscious but alive. With a smile of incredulous hope etched on his face by the last glow of the flare, Casely staggered out of his cupola. His eyes were fixed on the rippling glare in the south, and he didn't seem to notice when Jones plucked his sleeve.

"God bless the Air Force," the TC was whispering. "God bless the Air Force."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BAIRD SEARLES

FILMS



Transcendence on the Tube

MYTHS AND LEGENDS have always provided a fertile mine of material for fantasy, and Christian myth is no exception (how many Adam and Eve variations have there been?), though it is possibly less glamorous because so many of us were stuffed with the Sunday school versions at an early age. However, Sunday school did not go into the story of Salome very thoroughly for obvious reasons, and, brief though it is, it's certainly one of the more provocative dramas of the Bible. It could be argued that it really isn't fantasy since nothing supernatural occurs, but the whole ambiance is so outre and death-concerned that it is a great take off point for the fantastic in style if not technically in content.

A brief digression here on this question of fantasy of style rather than content. It continues to amaze me that so many fans of fantasy and science fiction can accept the most bizarre and mind-stretching concepts in literature, but seem almost literally blind to visual fantasy, and by that I don't mean movies (or whatever) *about* a fantastic subject, but those which have been made fantastic *to the eye* directly. In literature it is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

difficult to create a fantastic style, per se; the fantasy must almost necessarily be in content (though there is always Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* trilogy as a classic example of a narrative in which nothing overtly supernatural happens, but which is so bizarre in characters and milieu that it is one of *the* great works of the imagination; interestingly enough, Peake was a superb visual artist). But when you're working in a visual medium, you can take a mundane event and by manipulating the look of everything involved, turn it into something that is literally fantastical.

What all this is leading up to is that I have recently seen a film of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, made for French television and shown on my local PBS station; presumably most of the nation's educational stations will show it eventually. If it is broadcast locally and you have any interest at all in the wondrous, the imaginative, the magical—SEE IT!

Wilde's handling of the Salome legend was pretty far out to start with, of course. Even these days, when anything goes, it has a vicious air of corruption. But this production (produced and directed by Pierre Koralnik) takes it about twice as far. And that's what's going to be difficult to convey here in print. When you're trying to communicate content, it's easy enough ("the giant squid appeared and swallowed the Golden Gate bridge"), but when you're trying to communicate visual style. . .

The exteriors. . .blasted volcanic landscapes under skies of a perpetual molten brass. The interiors. . .filmed in the incredible buildings of Gaudi, the famed surrealist architect whose buildings look like melted sculptures. Herodias. . .nacreous breast and belly plates, with great scarlet wings from the shoulders and a red wig of coiled serpents. Herod. . .a collar of beaten gold towering above his head, which is incongrously crowned with pink roses. Salome. . .in a white burnoose, crawling up a hill of stone toward John *or* dancing for Herod, dressed in a transparent blue body stocking, her face painted blue, performing on what looks like a sheet of multi-colored ice as large as a ballroom with the veils—*miles* of veils—rippling in the background, *or* caressing the head of John in an endless landscape of rock ridges, dotted with outbreaks of smoking fire.

Think of the most glittering, alien court ever evoked by an s-f writer—Elric's in Imrryr, Tardos Mors' in Helium, the Padishah Emperor's of the Imperium—and then multiply it by ten. (Writers in the field, not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

usually being socially sophisticated types, haven't been awfully good at doing decadent courts; they usually sound like local Shriner's meetings or warmed-over Wilde.) There are odd elisions of time and space in this production, also. Despite all the talk of the moon and torches, it seems to be a world of perpetual sunset; the action could occur over two hours or two months and seems to wander inside and outside arbitrarily; the camera, as neurotically restless as the actors, is always in motion. Oh, hell, I cannot do it justice in print. I can but say—again—see it.

But a final note. There is one truly supernatural facet to this *Salome.* The title role is portrayed (brilliantly) by Ludmilla Tcherina, whom you may remember as the ebon-haired, ivory-skinned beauty from "The Red Shoes." To me she was always the archetypal sorceress, Morgan le Fay come to life. Well, "The Red Shoes" was made in the late '40s, and she is even more alluringly beautiful now—*and* looks the young girl that Salome must be. It's really rather scarey.

*This month's also-rans. . .*A boring movie called *Asylum* consisting of four boring stories by Robert Bloch about things that come alive (mechanical toys, tailor's dummies, dismembered bodies) and kill people in boring ways. . .A TV movie called *Gargoyles* for which, if I were a water spout on Notre Dame, I would sue CBS. . . Broadway's first science fiction musical, a thing called *Via Galactica*, whose only distinction was the use of six trampolines set in the stage to simulate low grav, but which only succeeded in making the large cast look like they were terrified of breaking their necks.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The entertaining tale of Operation Gobble, in which the U. S. Bureau of Demonology combats a wood goblin infestation in a classic ecological fashion.

Too Many Goblins

by WILLIAM LEE

THE LAST CORRIDOR ON the eighth floor of the New Interior Building leads the occasional visitor along some hundred yards of green and gray floor tiles and past dozens of closed doors. Near the end the tiles give way to a short section of wall-to-wall carpeting and another door whose glass panel reads:

DEPUTY DIRECTOR
BUREAU OF DEMONOLOGY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
RECEPTION

On this quiet day in early summer the reception room, furnished with file cabinets and a medium-sized walnut desk, was occupied only by a medium-sized but notably luscious secretary. Her name was Lois Merton. She had long green eyes and long red hair and various other desirable attributes. She believed that being Mr. Clay's private secretary was better than having a job in the White House. She finished sorting and reading the morning mail, retouched her lips, and waited for him to call.

In the inner office, Rufus Clay sat with his feet on the desk and digested the *Wall Street Journal*. He was tall, spare and if, like Lois, you fancied craggy features and a broken nose, tolerably good looking. Presently he tossed the paper into the out basket, lowered his feet to the floor and yelled for his secretary.

Over the year or so that she had worked for him, he had thought about her a good deal. She had become nearly a state of mind, and this was dangerous for an eligible bachelor. She was ornamental, intelligent and re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

markably efficient; more ambitious for him than he was for himself. So he treated her always with careful casualness. She came in with the mail and a cup of coffee.

"Thanks," he said. "What's on the fire?"

"Here's what you'll want to look at first, and here's the rest. The two on top are from Mr. Peterson about the new budget. There's a memo down from the secretary's office with a clipping from a Los Angeles paper. It's about unicorns and it's very critical of the bureau."

"The unicorn is a mythical beast," Rufus muttered.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing. I was just quoting. They probably have them in Los Angeles. What else?"

"A letter from Senator Hess."

"Um. Addressed personally to the director, isn't it?"

"Yes, but since we don't know when Dr. Tate will be back, I thought you'd want to handle it."

Rufus knew that Dr. Tate wouldn't be back for six weeks. There was no holding him when he got into the Mayan jungles looking for feathered serpents and such. Lois knew it, too. She was well informed by the office grapevine, assisted as it was by a small Delphic oracle secreted in a broom closet. But neither of them admitted the knowledge.

"You're right. If it's congressional, we'd better move on it. What's itching the senator?"

"Wood goblins, sir."

"Doesn't sound very important. What's the trouble?"

"They're eating up the new turnip crop."

"This bothers somebody?"

"The turnip farmers. It appears that most of the senators constituents are turnip farmers."

"That may account for Senator Hess. Is that the works?"

"Yes, sir."

"OK. Give me an hour to digest this budget thing; then we'll tackle some dictation. Ask Dr. Gilman to come in at eleven."

For the hour, Rufus dutifully immersed himself in the peculiar world of budgets. Once he paused to light a cigarette and wonder again, as he so often did, how he had gotten into demonology. He didn't care for demons. Incubi and succubi left him cold. Elves, the senseless little idiots, were a bore. Even mermaids. They looked well enough in black and white photographs, but their skins were a sickly green, and out of water they gasped like asthmatics. Could responsibility for mermaids be transferred to Fish and Wildlife Service? Probably not.

Rufus had had every inten-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion of being an electronics engineer. The lucky fellows had little to worry about but glitches. But when he had finished school, electronics engineers had been a dime a dozen, and he took what came. Once in demonology he had risen rapidly through the ranks until now, still in his early thirties, he was second to the director. He was good at his job.

Through with the mail, he called Lois and dictated until eleven. The letter to Senator Hess, after several versions, pointed out, first, that the bureau admired the senator for his sagacity in detecting an incipient problem; second, that the bureau had been aware of the problem and had already undertaken an analysis; and, third, that there was not really any problem which wouldn't take care of itself. It was always well to give Congress a choice of answers.

Promptly at eleven Dr. Gilman knocked hesitantly and came in. He subsided into a chair and gave a jerky nod, but did not speak. Rufus hardly knew Ray Gilman, even after ten years in the bureau, even during the period when they had been on the same echelon. That wasn't remarkable. Gilman, with a few of his fellows, had always been immured in Taxonomy Branch, more concerned with the color of a dragon's spines than with the economic depredations of the deadly lizard. He was slight, somewhat stooped, and uneasy with humans, much more at home with the gentler supernaturals.

"No, please stay, Lois," Rufus Clay said. "Take some rough notes of what Dr. Gilman has to tell us. Smoke, Ray?"

"Thank you, I don't indulge."

"I'd forgotten," said Rufus. "I asked you to drop in to brush me up a little on goblins, specifically, wood goblins. I think you've rather specialized in them."

Dr. Gilman looked alarmed. "Specialized? Oh, no. Well, hardly. Only to a degree, that is. Goblins and some of the related sprites."

"Yes, of course. Can you give me a quick rundown on the characteristics of the American wood goblin?"

"Well, let me see. Height, thirty inches or so. Weight, fifteen pounds average. Exoskeleton, of course. Heads globular. The carapace is brittle and easily broken, but if they are injured, they can usually repair themselves. Afterward they may be rather deformed."

Rufus interrupted. "How on earth could you tell?"

The levity was not appreciated. "I have seen some pitiful

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cases. Color, green or brown to nearly black. Eyes mounted on short stalks and move independently. At a distance they may seem smaller than they are because they walk with a stooped posture. On the other hand, they can jump distances up to forty feet. But you surely know all this."

"Please keep going. You mustn't overestimate my knowledge of wood goblins. We handled a case on hobgoblins a couple of years ago, but they're not the same thing."

"I should say not. An unfortunate similarity of terms for two quite different species. I take it the bureau has some special interest in wood goblins at this time."

"Yes, we'll get to that. What do they eat?"

"Oh, my goodness, whatever the poor things can get. They used to eat a lot of grundles, but there aren't many any more."

"Come to think of it, I haven't seen a grundle for years. Nasty, squirmy little things. What else?"

"They like fireflies, but mostly they have to eat vegetables. Potatoes, you know, turnips, squash, parsnips and so on. They don't like spinach."

"Neither do I."

"Oh, you should eat it," said Gilman. "It's very good for you. If the goblins would only eat more greens, they'd be healthier."

"They're not healthy?"

"Not very. A wood goblin should live twenty years and reproduce for sixteen. Some of them don't."

"Um. Tell us about the reproductive cycle."

Dr. Gilman glanced embarrassedly at Lois, but turned his eyes on the floor and continued bravely. "Well, they reproduce very much like humans, but having hard shells, they rattle rather while they. . .while they are about it. It's dangerous to approach a pair while they are rattling."

Rufus laughed. "It's dangerous to approach even one at the best of times. I ran over one once."

"Oh, dear. What happened?"

"It was just at dusk, and one of them jumped right in front of the car. It sounded like driving through a pile of dry bones. I got out and walked back, and it was sitting in the road putting itself together again. It glared at me and I got out fast, but I had a headache for the next three days."

"Yes, that's how it is when they hate you, but you can make friends with them."

"I'd as soon make friends with a tarantula. You were talking about their reproduction."

"Ah, yes. Well, they have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

four pups to a litter, one litter a year."

"For sixteen years. Good lord. Have we any idea how many there are in the country?"

Gilman shook his head regretfully. "A census is badly needed. Some years back they were nearly wiped out by DDT, you recall, but they have acquired immunity and are making a nice comeback."

"Too nice, I'm afraid," Rufus said. "We have a letter from Senator Hess. They've become a nuisance in his state."

"Oh, dear," said Dr. Gilman.

"So how can they be controlled?"

"That I would not know."

"Have they any natural enemies? If goblins eat grundles, what eats the goblins?"

Dr. Gilman's lips compressed to a stubborn line.

"You know I can consult the literature, Ray. It will be in the journals."

Gilman appeared to be undergoing inner turmoil. At last he said, "Trolls." The word cost him an effort.

"Anything else?"

"Silver bullets, of course, but goblins are difficult to shoot. They can go invisible for limited periods."

Rufus Clay stood up and let Dr. Gilman make his escape. "Not very helpful," he told Lois. "Trolls are dangerous, and we haven't got any anyway. You might give Miss Stickney a call and ask her to dig out a few references on goblin control."

Lois went to the library herself and came back burdened with books, journals and a few Xeroxed pages. For her own interest and to nurture a hunch, she had drawn a thin volume titled *Trolls and Trolloids of the Fjord Country*, written by one Nils Gunderson. This she took with her to the cafeteria, and read assiduously until one.

The afternoon was largely taken up with a visitor from G. E. who was scheduled to demonstrate a device for detecting warbs in the woodwork, and, what with one thing and another, it was Tuesday before the goblins got another hearing. A private showing of films on goblins was put on in the big conference room. Lois slipped in quietly and sat in the back row. The first film was overexposed, the sound track was full of noise, and for the most part you couldn't see the goblins for the trees. The other had been made by the Disney Studios, and the camera work was superb, but the goblins talked instead of hissing and made bad puns. Neither cast any light on control methods.

Later, with becoming diffidence, Lois reminded Rufus Clay that he had mentioned trolls.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Evidently they're pretty effective," he told her. "A troll can eat up twenty or thirty goblins in a night. There haven't been any goblins in Scandinavia for a generation. But we haven't got any trolls."

"We could rent some. There's the Department of Demonology in Oslo where we might get them, maybe even on a loan basis."

He thought about that. "It's a possibility. But they are dangerous. They eat people. That's well recorded."

"Not very often," she said.

He grinned. "No, once is enough."

"And there are good spells to confine them."

"How come you know so much about trolls?"

"My grandfather was Norwegian. He told me a lot about them." Her grandfather had, in fact, been Boston Irish, but a small lie was allowable if it served a good purpose.

"Um. I wonder how long it would take to get them over here."

"If they have them in stock, maybe no more than a week. BOAC will carry supernaturals on charter flights if you take a special policy with Lloyds."

"They're too big for air transport. We couldn't afford it."

"Trolls are hollow behind. They look awful in front, but if you walk around behind one, you see it's nothing but a shell."

"True," he said. "You mean you could stack them up on the plane like paper cups. If you knocked them out first, of course. It's a good suggestion, Lois. Locate the Oslo address, will you, and the name of the right man, and we'll get off a cable of inquiry."

The expenditure was such as should have been authorized by Director Tate, but there was no possibility of getting in touch with him. Rufus scowled at the cost estimates and went ahead. And Operation Gobble got off to a good start.

They had eighty-four trolls. By shifting a number of people Rufus was able to put seventy field agents on temporary duty in the southeastern states, and each man held responsibility for one troll. The spares were confined in a small demonarium in Bethesda.

For six days the campaign proceeded without a hitch. One by one, areas of about ten square miles would be enclosed with the Norwegian spell, and a troll would be delivered by helicopter. There were not many residents who had to be evacuated, since the areas were largely wooded, and very few who objected. Public relations had done a good job. Two nights sufficed for a ninety-nine

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

percent cleanup. The hissing of goblins diminished, and nearby farmers began to have some hope for their crops.

Rufus posted Lois's name for an Employee Suggestion Award and said he didn't know how he could get along without her.

She blushed demurely, by holding her breath, and whispered, "35-26-36."

"What's that?"

"A spell. It's supposed to bring a girl luck."

"Um. There seems to be a bit of trouble near a town called Stonedike, in Virginia. Troll Number 38 has gotten rather out of hand. Have you heard about it?"

"A little. They say that Agent O'Hare has let it escape."

"That doesn't worry me. O'Hare will scoop it up soon enough. Unfortunately, he pushed the panic button and got the local authorities in on the act. A couple of our people are on the way to back him up, but I think I'll run down myself this afternoon. It's not far, and I'm curious to see what the trouble is. Want to go along? I know you're interested in trolls."

She admitted her interest, agreed to be ready in an hour, and scooted for her apartment to change into something more provocative than she allowed herself in the office.

They were out of Washington by early afternoon and made excellent time as far as Charlottesville. The skies were a satisfactory shade of blue, and Rufus's car was a pleasure to ride in. Away from the office he was more relaxed and asked her questions about herself, even volunteered an anecdote about his two years in the army. This was more like it.

Stonedike was far from the arterial highways. They got briefly lost before they found the town and were presently halted at a roadblock. A cadaverous young man stepped out and waved a flag at them.

"Road's closed, mister. Got to go back to the crossroads."

"Why?"

"Some trouble down thataway. Government fellas won't let you get through."

Rufus flipped open his wallet and passed it out the window.

"You're one of them, huh? Guess you know what you're doing. Y'll find them at Culver's Mill, 'bout half a mile. They're waiting for the dawgs."

Half a dozen men were standing in a group at the next hilltop. Agent O'Hare recognized them and waved. There were two other demonology men Lois had seen once or twice, a local sheriff with a shiny star-shaped badge and a pistol at his hip, a youthful

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

state trooper, a fat man named Culver (though there was no mill to be seen), and Dr. Gilman.

Rufus raised his eyebrows. "Didn't know you were here, Ray."

Ray Gilman looked flustered. "I thought I might be. . .that I might help in some way. I'm on annual leave."

"I see. Where do we stand, O'Hare?"

"He's somewhere in those woods yonder, no question of that. How he ever broke through the spell is a mystery to me. There's something not quite right about T-38."

"What's not right?"

"These whistles that were supposed to bring them to heel. T-38 never came the way he should. Fought the whistle every step of the way. We've been whistling our lungs out ever since he broke away. No go."

O'Hare put the device which looked like a recorder to his lips and blew. A mournful note like a sick owl echoed through the woods. They cocked their heads and listened, but there was no response.

"You see how it is? I'll say this for him, he sure eats up goblins. He'd be fat as a pig if he wasn't hollow behind."

"I wonder," Rufus said, "if he could be a mutation. They often do, you know. Mutate. You're waiting for dogs?"

"Sheriff Stump, here, has sent off a couple of deputies to bring a pack of hounds. They use them around here for coon hunting, mostly, but they sometimes tree a demon of one kind or another."

The sheriff spat. "Ought to be an open season," he said.

Lois, on the outskirts of the group was ill at ease. To have the boss come down from Washington suggested criticism. To have his secretary along was added embarrassment. She turned away and strolled down the road, where Ray Gilman was pacing slowly, head down and hands clasped behind his back. His unhappiness about the operation was evident. Rufus called after her.

"Lois, are you protected?"

"I've memorized three spells," she called back. "I'm OK."

Beyond the crest of the hill the road dipped into a shallow valley where, through a break in the trees, a small stream was visible. A stone bridge, only wide enough for one-lane traffic, crossed it. Lois paused and stared at the bridge.

The Gunderson book had said that many trolls lived under bridges. The men had probably thought of it, but it wouldn't hurt to look. Dr. Gilman was no longer in sight. He must have turned off onto a path. It would be a sort of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

personal triumph if she should discover T-38. She went on, walking more briskly.

On the bridge she stopped and stamped a foot, but it made no sound on the macadam. On the farther bank a narrow track led down to the water's edge. Muttering a short spell which was supposed to prevent runners in sheer panty hose, she scrambled down.

The sun was close to setting, and it was shadowy under the bridge, but after a moment she could see him. He crouched in a deep pool and stared back at her, his slit pupils as expressionless as a basilisk's. What she could see of him was a whitish, greenish, gray, streaked with mud and slime. He blinked. His gash of a mouth opened and a black tongue flicked back and forth. Water dripped from his raised talons, and it was so silent she could hear the drops fall. For a second she felt unreasonable terror, just because T-38 looked so much more ominous than the pictures in the books. Then she pronounced the spell that made trolls follow you and backed slowly up the bank.

On the road she waited until she was sure he was coming, then turned back toward the hilltop. Behind her the troll had emerged and taken one uncertain giant step. She had a ridiculous inclination to run, but held her pace to a walk, looking over her shoulder now and then to make sure he was following.

He was following, all right. He was closer.

The last rays of the sun threw his shadow, lurching and grotesque, along the road ahead of her. The shadow extended itself and a taloned hand descended, forcing her to her knees. Whatever other spells she might have used had fled her mind. She screamed.

Beyond the hilltop a dilapidated station wagon was disgorging a score of assorted hound dogs, grinning and thumping their tails at the prospect of a hunt. They yelped, bayed or howled, according to their natures. Lois's scream went unheard. The man in charge of the pack asked where the troll had last been seen and led them off in search of a print fresh enough to have an odor. Rufus looked around.

"Where's Lois?" he demanded, "and where's Ray Gilman?" Nobody knew.

With three protective spells at her command she should be in no danger from the troll, but these woods stretched for miles with few roads or farms. She could easily lose herself.

An eighth of a mile into the forest Dr. Gilman leaned breathless against a tree and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

peered through the green shadows. Although he had gone on field trips as a group member, he was not, himself, familiar with forest country, and he found it terrifying. There was no sound to be heard but the shrilling of insects. Hurrying, he had turned an ankle painfully, and he bore his weight on the other leg. After a minute of panting he gathered enough breath to call out in a thin voice, pitched deliberately high:

"Ula, ula, ula, ula." Then again, "Ula, ula, ula."

He waited anxiously.

The sound of the nearby locusts died away. Weeds and grasses rustled, and a goblin was looking straight at him. "Ula, ula," he said. "Good boy." Awkwardly he lowered himself to sit on the mossy ground. The goblin approached warily. More rustlings heralded the arrival of a whole swarm.

Although he professed a sympathy for goblins, most of Ray Gilman's experience of them had been under protected conditions, and he was uneasy. He knew what he wanted to do. He wanted to lead as many as he could out of this perilous situation where they were menaced by dogs, hunters, unsympathetic demonology men and an abberant troll. He did not, however, have much idea how to go about it. Toward the west, away from the road and the cars, away from the dogs whose baying could now be heard faintly, lay comparative safety.

He was surrounded, now, by goblins, stooping, weaving their horny bodies back and forth, edging slowly forward with their eye stalks extended toward him. He pressed his back to the tree trunk and pushed himself upward. "Ula," he said once more and stumbled in the direction where the press of goblins was least.

Lois was between terror and despair, but she had not lost consciousness and she held to a thread of anger. She had tried at first to fight the troll, but she could have fought a ten-ton truck just as successfully. All the strength of her arms and shoulders could not bend back one of his clutching fingers by an iota. Her anger was sustained and multiplied by the fact that she was being carried, fireman fashion, over the shoulder of the giant troll, her legs clasped immovably across his chest, her head hanging down his back. It was ignominious and damnably uncomfortable. She could see that he was indeed hollow behind. Except for the great bulbous head, the creature from here was concave, of no thickness at all. It didn't affect his strength.

She racked her brain in vain

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for the missing spells, but they were cast in old Norse, strings of meaningless syllables of which she could not even remember the openings. She was reduced to pounding at the troll wherever she could reach. He paid not the slightest attention and pushed his way through the forest in pounding six-foot strides.

She was sorry that she had read some of what Dr. Gunderson had written about trolls. Of course she didn't know what this one was about. He might be simply trying to escape from all the spells which had hampered his every move since leaving Norway. On the other hand, once they had reached what he considered a safe and secluded place, he might have other ideas. Trolls fancied Norwegian princesses. She wasn't a princess, nor remotely Scandinavian, but she was female and probably they weren't fussy. It could be a fate worse than death. Well, maybe not worse, but rough.

Rufus Clay was becoming more alarmed by the minute. Halfway down the hill toward the stream he paused irresolute. At the bridge the dogs had picked up a good scent and started a baying that was both businesslike and nervous. They didn't like what they were being asked to hunt, the scent was too strange, but they were coming back toward him. They paused and eddied around an opening into the woods, then, led by the boldest bitch, disappeared under the overhang. He followed. The dogs were ranging out on both sides of the narrow path, wasting time without losing face. At a jog he made his way through the pack. The dogs were glad to be led.

If trolls had acute noses, and certainly they were long enough to be of some use, or acute hearing, T-38 must have known he was about to overtake a swarm of goblins, but they were all about him before he broke stride. Perhaps the goblins which had once lived in Norway were remembered only as something good to eat. Goblins which surrounded you, crowding closer and closer with their eye stalks vibrating, goblins which hissed like pit adders, were perhaps something he had not reckoned with. Keeping firm hold of Lois, he gathered one up with his long left arm, crackled it like a walnut between his talons, and popped its head into his enormous mouth. The hissing rose to a crescendo.

The goblins knew this monster for an enemy. He had left enough of their headless bodies scattered through the woods last night. But the troll had dealt with them in isolated

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ones or twos. They had not previously outnumbered him fifty to one. They glared at him and hated him. He was insensitive to that. They charged, clambering up his legs, clinging to his body with their sticky pads. They avoided his hollow rear, which was as well for Lois. After a moment he dropped her. She landed more or less on hands and knees and looking down at the ground avoided seeing, so far as possible, the prancing, pouncing, maddened goblins, while she crawled away from the center of the melee. Inevitably she touched them and was ignored. A headless body came sailing through the air, thumped her on the back and splattered her with black blood. She wasn't aware of it as an individual happening. When her hand came in contact with a shoe, she failed to recognize it as such and snatched the hand away.

But it stayed a shoe. She looked up. Ray Gilman was shaking all over. His eyes stared. He seemed on the point of collapse. "It's awful," he moaned. "Do you know how to get out of here? I don't know the way and we've got to get out. This fight is awful."

She stood up and was annoyed to find herself shaking just as much. She looked back at the troll at the moment he was pulled down by the sheer weight of the goblins. They swarmed over him, but he was far from beaten. His arms continued to flail about, hurling goblins in all directions. Some of them were so badly damaged when they landed that they were out of the fight and could do no more than begin putting themselves together again, not always with their own parts. Others, even with an eye or an arm missing, scrambled back.

She heard shouting then, and the baying of dogs, and suddenly Rufus was there with his arm holding her up. He demanded to know whether she was hurt.

"I don't think I am, much," she said, "but I ache all over. Trolls are tough characters."

"This particular character is going to be shipped right back to Norway," he said. "He isn't trustworthy. In the meantime we'd better give him a hand or there won't be anything to ship back. Are you OK for a minute?"

She nodded.

"Gilman, what's the best spell to quiet these little horrors down? You must know that."

A quarter of an hour before, Dr. Gilman would probably have been unwilling to answer that question. Now he was ready enough.

"Gulo rhus tebo. Taragolo. Though he pronounced the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

words in quavering, uncertain tones, their effect was immediate. The goblins, those of them that were left, sat down wherever they were. Their eye stalks drooped. They were strictly turned off.

T-38 got slowly to his feet and stood swaying and shaking his head as if there were water in his ears. O'Hare bleated on the whistle and the troll staggered toward him obediently.

The dogs were puzzled and unhappy. In a proper hunt they should have had the opportunity to chase their quarry up a tree, but the quarry was now going off with one of the hunters, and these goblins sitting in disconsolate heaps were no game. They smelled dreadful, and no self-respecting dog would attempt to bite one.

Rufus, turning back to speak to Lois, discovered her in crumpled disarray on the ground. She looked pathetically helpless. Her clothes were in shreds and tatters. There was a streak of blood on her face, and the one eye which he could see was turning black.

Forgetting the goblins, he grasped her wrists and hoisted her to his shoulder in a fireman's carry. She shifted a little, to spare a bruise in the area of her appendix and suppressed a desire to giggle, which would have been out of order in view of her state of pathetic unconsciousness. This fireman business seemed to be becoming a habit.

But Rufus's shoulder was much more comfortable than that of the troll, and from time to time he patted her bottom solicitously.

She stayed unconscious.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Joseph Green's new story concerns a biologist and an anthropologist who find themselves in the midst of a developing conflict between a race of peaceful yellow giants and a species of warlike humanoids.

Robustus Revisited

by JOSEPH GREEN

"ART, I...LITERALLY... yearn to see...another human face!" Carol gasped between breaths as she tried to match her husband's long strides. The planetary lander was almost down. Its blue rocket exhaust turned yellow as the new grass below it ignited.

Arthur Fleming glanced sideways at Carol, surprised by the intensity in her voice. For him their year on this planet had passed fairly quickly and pleasantly.

They came to a halt just outside the burning area. The Protector curled around Arthur's neck stirred restlessly, and he absently rubbed his pet behind the ears. The flames had probably frightened it.

The lander's hatch opened. A lean, sharp-faced man appeared and hurried down the steps. Arthur recognized Fred Yardley, an anthropologist he knew slightly. Behind him was a lovely dark-haired woman who looked uncomfortable in her bulky protective bush clothing. Arthur remembered that her first name was Lydia, and she had been one of his problem students in biology.

"Art! Good to see you!" Fred extended one hand as he walked through the burning grass, fanning smoke away with the other. The tough one-piece bush suit was fireproof.

Arthur and Carol were dressed in short skirts made of locally woven grasses, with their feet in bark moccasins. They waited for the new arrivals to reach them.

"Man! It's good to feel real gravity again," Fred said as they shook hands. The two men introduced their wife-partners, and Arthur noted Fred's appreciative look when he met Carol. She was a bare five feet

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tall, doll-like compared to Arthur's six foot five and 230 pounds, but with a lovely figure. Carol was nude except for the skirt, and tanned to a light bronze that nicely offset her darkly golden hair.

Several *Thumesin* adults were walking toward the landing site, moving with their deceptively casual speed. These humanoid natives averaged almost seven feet in height for the males, and were often on the plump side. Male and female alike wore the short skirts and moccasins, in a variety of vegetable dye colors. Their bodies were covered by a long silky coat of fine yellow hair; the faces were smooth and hairless. The usual white, furry Protector curled around each person's neck.

Arthur introduced the new humans to the *Thumesin.* Regor, a huge male almost as round as an apple, was the principal song maker of this tribe. Two of his grown sons, Sonsi and Tablor, were almost as large as their father. The other three members of the group were all influential heads of households. They obviously wanted to know what type of person had been sent among them.

His Protector stirred again, and Arthur looked down at it. To his surprise, the pink glow that normally shone through the light white fur had faded to a faint red. He glanced quickly at those around the necks of the nearest *Thumesin;* all had turned white to some degree. There was a source of potential violence in the vicinity.

Arthur turned away from the Yardleys, and gently pried at the locked claws on his chest. A Protector liked to curl around its owner's neck until the front paws of the long body could grasp the back ones and form a circle, with the chin resting on one shoulder. In this position the tiny animal's slim foxlike head was pointed in the direction his host faced. A pet could see ahead if it cared to open its eyes; Protectors seldom did.

Reluctantly, the claws parted. Arthur gently lifted the soft white form and handed it to Sonsi. Since there was room for only one around his neck, the huge male held it against the grass skirt. The four claws locked in the weave, the long body bent in a U shape, and it seemed to go back to sleep. A faint tinge of pink appeared beneath the thin hair.

"I thought that was a fur collar," said Fred Yardley, curiosity strong in his voice. "What kind of pet is it? Why do you keep one?"

"It's a Protector. Every *Thumesin* has one," Arthur replied, his mind elsewhere. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had learned to read his pet fairly well during the months he had worn it. Part of its distress might be caused by his unspoken anxiety, but most had to be from exposure to Fred or Lydia.

The yellow-haired giants were starting to move away, after barely greeting the new arrivals. For the *Thumesin* this was distinctly unfriendly behavior.

The Yardleys had a large number of travel cases. Arthur requested help in carrying them, and with embarrassed smiles Sonsi and Tablor returned. Five minutes later Fred and Lydia were sitting on mats in a small bark hut, their home until the tribe exhausted the local food supply and moved on.

Regor's sons said a few friendly words and departed. Several children, bodies clothed only by Protectors around the neck, appeared in the doorway and stared solemnly at the new faces. They too soon left. By *Thumesin* standards this had been a cool reception, but at least the Yardleys had not been rejected outright.

Fred immediately dug out his recorder. "I want to hear about these peculiar pets; nothing on 'em in our scanty literature," he explained as he turned it on. "Now when did you acquire yours, Arthur?"

The man's presumption bordered on arrogance. "Just a moment," Arthur said, raising a hand palm-outward in protest. "You have plenty of time in which to learn how little WorldTec knows about the *Thumesin*. First, I'd like to know if you have any new instructions."

"Sure do. And judging from the enthusiasm in your reports on the peacefulness of the *Thumesin*, you aren't going to like 'em. I have 300 metal arrowheads with me. I'm to invent the bow and arrow, for defense against the *Cardi*."

"You're right, I don't like it." Arthur heard the anger creeping into his voice, and was glad he had handed his Protector to Sonsi. For the moment he did not want to restrain his emotions.

"Sorry, Art, the governing board made the final decision; it'll stick."

"Why does the board think the *Thumesin* need weapons?" asked Carol. "The *Cardi* are 300 miles downwind. They never come to this continent."

"Not yet, but they will. Their sailing canoes are getting very sophisticated. It's just a matter of time until they discover the centerboard, learn to tack against the wind. And when those hungry devils find this little Eden, see the potential food supply the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thumesin represent—" Fred shook his head. "Our team there reports some of the *Cardi* tribes know this island exists, by the way. They picked up a few unknown-land-to-the-west-haunted-by-demons stories, the usual nonsense. You can bet the *Cardi* would already be here if there was some good reason to paddle that far against the wind."

"I often wonder if we have any business out here, trying to help these two species," said Lydia. It was obviously intended to be a profound statement; it came out flat and shallow.

"That bit of letting primitive worlds flower in isolation was discredited a half century ago," said Fred, briskly demolishing his wife's attempt to appear thoughtful. "Let's just be thankful our heavy-handed government had the good sense to contract the development work out to universities."

"I'm not sure but what the *Thumesin* can look after themselves. But that's your field." In Arthur's mind something revolted against the university's decision. The *Cardi* were a small humanoid species on the other inhabitable continent. They were carnivorous, aggressive, and warlike, the very opposite of the peaceful yellow giants. Arthur had seen extensive reports from the teams stationed there. The *Cardi* ate anything, including each other. The humans gained acceptance by using rifles to make themselves valuable as hunters.

"That's not all," Fred went on, grinning slightly. "I'm to teach your friends the advantages of eating meat."

"What! Why that's ridiculous!"

"Knew that one would jar you. Nope, it's perfectly sensible. These woods are full of game, and the big fellows have omnivorous dentition. According to your own reports, they spend a third of every day hunting and ingesting a vegetarian diet. Now I know you've started them on permanent gardens, but that's just a minor improvement. The energy content of meat is at least three times that of the average vegetable. First we teach them to hunt with the bow and arrow, which serves the double purpose of preparing for the *Cardi*. Later we introduce animal husbandry. It shouldn't be long before we can establish permanent villages. That should free at least a quarter of the adults from food production, and we can start developing the artisan classes. From there on—"

"I'm familiar with the scenario," Arthur said, keeping his voice low. As biologists he and Carol had been sent to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Arcadia solely to develop the food supply, but he knew the master plan. Until now it had not included teaching herbivores to eat meat.

"I don't like the sound of any of it," Arthur went on. It was something of a relief to feel the anger burning inside and not have a Protector twisting and turning in agitation around his neck.

"Art, you're familiar with our own beginning, aren't you? Remember the two most important subhuman species, *Australopithecus africanus* and *robustus*? They lived in the same part of Africa and became contemporaries, though *africanus* was there first. He was a little fellow, less than five feet tall, and all carnivore; very similar to the *Cardi.* Now *robustus* was a herbivore, not as large as the *Thumesin* but still a big creature. They weren't contemporary too long; the carnivore wiped out the herbivore. We eventually descended from *africanus* as the all-purpose unspecialized animal, the omnivore; but that was later. Here we have a re-creation of that old battle, and it's going to have the same ending unless we do something."

"I'd never thought of it quite that way," said Carol. Fred's intensity seemed to have impressed her.

"I don't think the analogy is too sound," Arthur protested. "These two species are far more advanced in intelligence, and both are well into the stone age. We have no true time frame yet, but apparently the *Thumesin* are progressing as fast as the *Cardi.*"

"We doubt it. Remains to be proven yet, but the anthropology department thinks the *Thumesin* are an older species, got an earlier start."

"Weapons, fighting, and meat eating are pretty drastic changes to introduce into a culture," said Arthur, getting to his feet. "We'll talk about it more tomorrow. Carol and I had better try to get back before dark."

"Yes, well, we need to unpack, and . . ." Fred had not missed the coolness in Arthur's attitude. "We'll walk over to your place in the morning."

The Flemings met Sonsi on the trail just outside the little temporary village, still carrying the extra Protector. He plucked the small animal from his skirt and handed it to Arthur. In the elegantly simple *Thumesin* tongue Arthur thanked him and returned his pet to the normal riding position. The Protector stayed pink throughout the move.

"Which of the two carries violence in the heart, Sonsi?" asked Arthur.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The big humanoid smiled, six white incisors gleaming in his broad mouth. Unlike humans, they had never developed canine teeth. "I think you know, my friend. He is not truly evil, but strong emotions easily overcome him. He badly needs a Protector."

"And Fred would be the last man from Earth to accept one," Arthur replied with a smile. "Perhaps you can teach him, as you have taught me."

"We shall see," said Sonsi, and went on his way.

Arthur let Carol set their pace, loafing along beside her. The warmth of the afternoon was fading, dispelled by cool breezes. These semitropical woods were lush and green in this world without seasons. They were also free of large carnivores.

Arthur occasionally plucked a ripe fruit or nut as they passed food plants near the trail. These he fed to his Protector, in the normal *Thumesin* fashion.

"Art, I think Fred and the university board are right," Carol suddenly volunteered, after a long period of silence. They had just reached a fork in the game trail, and turned left to take the scenic route home. "Those Protectors keep the *Thumesin*, and you also, too darn placid and calm. According to all we know, a species progresses through conflict and resolution. These people don't even fight their environment, much less each other. I don't understand how they've gotten *this* far!"

"Through steadfastness, and avoiding personal and intraspecies strife," Arthur replied, wishing Carol's short legs could move faster. He wanted to arrive at the beach in time to see the sunset. "Just think of how much time and energy humans have always wasted under the competition-conflict ethos. Imagine what we could have done if whole-hearted cooperation had been the rule instead. We've lived with our system and its assumptions so long we take them for natural laws, and on Earth perhaps they are. But not here."

The Protectors were the new factor that Fred Yardley and the WorldTec board did not understand. Every *Thumesin* child received a pet as soon as he could care for it. He was expected to start curbing feelings of anger or violence immediately. The actual expression of such emotions was a matter of the gravest shame. There was no personal combat among the *Thumesin*, and little competition. Tribal warfare was an unknown concept.

The small furry Protectors were totally dependent on their hosts, leaving them only to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

breed or give birth. Their contribution to the symbiosis was a unique, apparently telepathic ability to sense emotions, primarily those of the host but also of others in the vicinity. In the presence of violent emotions a Protector's blood retreated to the internal organs, in ancient preparation for fight or flight. And they reacted to more than just the thoughts of the moment. The basic underlying emotional structure of a person could affect them.

From the evidence Arthur had seen, the *Thumesin* and their pets had spread quite rapidly over the entire small continent. All tribes spoke a common tongue and had very similar customs. At the moment the yellow-haired humanoids were in the advanced stone age. As always with so-called "primitive" societies they had a very complex social system, one far more advanced than their relatively crude technology. But the constant need for new food sources restricted them to small tribal units and required a seminomadic way of life. That would change when the gardens he and Carol had started became productive. Metal working would come with the settled villages, along with the more elaborate social structures of civilization.

The *Cardi* were at roughly the same stage on their continent, except for the possession of sailing canoes. But their species was divided into many warring tribes, and both personal and group combat was a way of life. At present their language was in the process of fragmenting, dividing into tribal dialects. They were more nearly following the path taken by man, progressing in highly productive spurts followed by frequent backsliding. The innovations forced by combat, the conflict-resolution system in general, worked. The species progressed. . .but at a terrible cost to the individuals involved. Arthur was convinced that the more steady and peaceful way of the *Thumesin* would succeed equally well.

They reached the coast just before the sun's red-rimmed disk sank below the watery horizon. The beach was only a few yards wide and of pure quartz, as white as snow. The crimson sunlight cast a diffused rosy glow over the gently swelling waves and sparkling sand. Arthur drank in the living beauty—until he glanced down the beach and saw four faint indentations at the water's edge, and then a horde of small footprints.

The Protector around his neck started trembling. Arthur glanced down and saw it had turned pure white, as bloodless

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as the quartz. He had failed to notice the first fading of color, and now it was far too late. He grasped Carol's arm and turned back toward the forest, in vain hope. . .and the *Cardi* poured out of the trees.

This was Arthur's first sight of the carnivorous humanoids, but there was no mistaking them. This raiding or exploratory party was all male. They averaged only five feet in height, but there was a lean and fighting toughness in their small frames. The hair covering was thicker than that of the *Thumesin*, in varying shades of brown. All were armed with flint-tipped throwing spears for game and shorter ones for personal combat.

The *Cardi* advanced silently, wide grins showing their incisors and side cutting fangs. Their spears were at the ready, but it was obvious the humans could not escape, and they wanted them alive.

Deep in the brush behind the warriors the horizontal sun rays revealed four sailing canoes, masts unstepped. Several raiders had resumed cutting and bending bushes to hide them. Firmly attached to the side of each, where it would extend well into the water, was a long horizontal board. At least one *Cardi* tribe had learned the principle of the centerboard, and to sail against the wind.

And Arthur remembered why the small warriors wanted them alive. It was a *Cardi* custom to ritually kill and eat the first prey caught when starting a major hunt.

Three hundred miles downwind the *Cardi* had been an abstraction, an understood part of an equation. But there was nothing abstract about those sharply pointed flint spears. They could kill. And the humans could be eaten. It was as simple and flat as that. Their superior knowledge and civilization would mean nothing to a hungry warrior gnawing the cooked flesh from their bones.

Arthur felt sick. And as the grinning little men surrounded them, he thought of the *Thumesin*, and felt still worse. The peaceful herbivores, whom he had never observed using a weapon of any kind, would be easy victims.

One of the hunters produced some coarsely woven rope and tied the hands of the captives. Carol was white faced and silent. She seemed to be suffering from severe shock. They were hustled through the woods to a clearing just past the canoes. The invaders had established a rough camp and were starting a fire.

The warrior holding Carol's arm abruptly tripped her. She uttered a sharp scream of terror as she fell. The sound jarred

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Arthur like a physical blow. The small fighter with the rope deftly caught her ankles and bound them together.

The sun had set, and deep shadows filled the thick undergrowth. Only three of the approximately thirty hunters were actually guarding the humans, the rest having returned to making camp. The one standing on Arthur's right reversed his spear and inserted the end between the captive's lower legs.

Arthur saw a desperate chance, and took it. He raised one foot very quickly and stamped on the spear shaft, just as his captor shoved him. His weight yanked the other end out of the hairy hand. He continued the forward motion by running headlong into the third warrior. Arthur's bulk bowled him over, and his throwing spear went flying.

Four long steps placed a thick bush between Arthur and the warrior with the rope. Running as rapidly as he dared, he angled back toward the trail. The undergrowth was thick enough to make him a fleeting target. He reached the narrow path without stumbling, and stretched his long legs to their limit.

Shouts of warning arose behind him. Arthur risked turning his head. A hunter was standing in the trail, body curved forward and hand extended. Arthur swerved to the right, brushing leaves, and the spear caught him high on the left shoulder with an audible *thunk!*

There was no sense of pain, only the felt impact. Arthur almost stumbled, but recovered. Seconds later he rounded a bend in the path. The spear, which had clung for a moment, dropped away. He felt the wetness of blood pouring down his bare back. And then the fork in the trail loomed ahead, and Arthur took the left one and pounded down it at his best speed. This path led to their temporary village, two miles ahead on the coast. If they had taken it instead of the walk along the beach they might have missed the raiders entirely.

Arthur's breath was coming hard. He held to his speed a moment more, then slowed to a fast trot. There were no sounds of pursuit behind him. The *Cardi* were too war-wise to chase him very far when it was after dark and in strange country.

Fifteen breathless minutes later Arthur trotted into the open compound in the center of sixteen bark huts just off the beach. He had worked the rope off his hands on the way. Most of the tribe were gathered around the central fire. Two adult heads of families, Stanil

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Rokah, broke away and joined him as Arthur hurried toward the extra-large hut he had fashioned with their help.

"Your Protector is white, friend Arthur, and your back has been injured," said Stanil, an elder whose body had thinned with age. "And where is your small mate?"

Arthur hesitated, then briefly told them what had happened. As he talked, he was digging out the bush clothing he and Carol had discarded. His only weapon was a .30-30 lever-action repeating rifle, a gun so simple and reliable it was the primary choice for people isolated from repair shops and battery chargers. But he could not kill thirty *Cardi* warriors with it. Arthur had thought of a better plan, one that stood a faint hope of success. But he did slip a handful of shells into the pouch attached to his skirt.

Arthur discarded his moccasins and stepped into the legs of the bush suit, which had built-in flexible shoes. Rokah reached and plucked the Protector from the human's neck. "Your little pet has had a very bad experience," the tall humanoid said, stroking it.

The Protector's skin was still white. Arthur zipped up his suit and slipped on the gloves, which locked to the wrists. There was also a head covering that attached at the neck, but he left it and instead picked up his underwater mask. It was a large clumsy affair which completely covered the face and had two boxlike attachments on either side. They contained several square feet of membrane, permeable to oxygen one way and carbon dioxide the other.

Arthur thought of a final touch and dug two cans of colored spray preservative out of his supplies. Working rapidly, he painted one arm and the opposing leg red, and the others yellow. Around the chest and shoulders he settled for big blobs of color.

"I will need my Protector," said Arthur, reaching for it. Reluctantly, Rokah surrendered the furry pink bundle. It did not want to return to Arthur and squirmed a little before finally locking its paws around his neck. Its color faded to an off-white.

Arthur stroked his pet's narrow back, willing himself to calmness as the *Thumesin* had taught him. It was his rational, cognitive mind that would save Carol, if that was possible. Anger would only handicap him. He caressed the Protector's neck and saw a faint tinge of red appear beneath the fur.

Arthur headed for the door, but paused. "My friends. . ." and after the words were said, he realized there was nothing to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

follow. He had no wisdom to leave them, no guidance as to what they should do if he failed and was himself eaten.

Arthur plunged into darkness. He headed for the *Cardi* camp at a fast trot.

The spear that had caught him in the left shoulder had jarred to a stop against the scapula bone. It was a painful started bleeding slightly as Arthur ran, but he ignored it. Just before reaching the fork, he left the trail and started worming his way through the brush. The large cooking fire was dimly visible ahead, and he could hear the sounds of ritual dancing and chanting.

To be effective, Arthur's appearance had to be a complete surprise. And he knew from several reports how the warlike little people guarded themselves in hostile territory. They kept three or four sentries in the brush, not anchored to a post but constantly circling their areas.

Arthur moved quietly toward the fire. When he had less than fifty feet to go, he felt his Protector stiffening, the small form rigid with strain. He stopped and slowly sank to his knees. Arthur had just started around a wide, waist-high bush. Crouching close to it, he waited. A moment later a dim form walked slowly between him and the light. The guard moved as silently as a hunting cat. Arthur saw a reflection of firelight off shining eyes, busily glancing in all directions.

Fortunately for Arthur the *Cardi* were primarily visual hunters. The sweat of tension and fear would have revealed him to a sensitive nose.

The sentry disappeared. A moment later Arthur felt the warm form around his neck slowly relaxing. When it was almost at ease again, he moved forward. This part of the plan, at least, was working as he had hoped.

The chanting from the camp drowned out any small noises Arthur made as he crept toward the fire. Behind the last thick brush he crouched and surveyed the scene.

Arthur saw what he had expected and planned for. The fire was two feet wide and about six long. Forked sticks had been driven into the dirt at each end, and a spitting pole lay ready to one side. The last of the flames were dying, leaving a bed of hot cooking coals. Carol lay tied at the opposite end, a guard standing by her. A small woman would hardly feed thirty hungry carnivores. . .but there would be more fresh meat tomorrow.

His Protector had tensed again as Arthur approached the open area. It stiffened into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rigidity when he donned the breathing mask and stepped into the open. The human could almost feel its pain.

There was a single yell of fright when Arthur appeared, and then astonished silence. He spread his painted arms wide, waving them in ritualistic circles as he walked steadily toward the fire. All dancing stopped. In stunned silence the hunters stared at the weird, wide-headed monster that had somehow gotten past their sentries without being discovered.

Arthur kept up his "magic" motions as he approached the fire pit. This was the critical moment. The *Cardi* culture was superstitious in the extreme. If they accepted him as a true demon, he had a chance to leave with Carol. But weird attire was not enough. Demonic powers had to be demonstrated.

When he reached the red coals, Arthur stepped into them at the same measured pace. He felt the heat immediately, under his chin and on the exposed back of his head. The mask filtered out the smoke that would have sent him into coughing fits, but the oxygen it let through was so hot it burned his lungs. And then his other foot came down in the flames. He knew agony.

There was a rip in the tough fabric forming the shoe. Arthur caught the involuntary flinch of pain as it started, and repressed it. He could almost feel his flesh charring, the agonized nerve ends burning. The pain wrenched and tore at him, demanding he jump out of the flames, save his disintegrating tissue. Every dying cell cried out for rescue, for an end to torment.

Time seemed to slow, to hang in frozen suspension over the little clearing. The hot air seared his throat; he dared not cough. In agony he took another short, deliberate step.

And another. And the fire pit ended, and he walked on gentle dirt again, and the relief was indescribable.

The guard standing by Carol scurried backward, his spear rising. Arthur ignored him, bending to scoop her up in his arms. He held the small form cradled against his chest and walked toward the welcoming darkness at the clearing's edge.

When the first shadows touched Arthur, there was a scream of rage behind him, the first sound to break the silence. He stopped and turned, hoping to frighten the would-be attacker. It was Carol's guard. Instead of retreating in fear the small fighter hurled his raised spear.

Arthur automatically calculated the path of the projectile and raised Carol above it. The spearhead thudded painfully against his chest and re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bounded. The bush clothing would repel even a metal point. Arthur turned and walked on. But then a second spear followed the first, bruising him badly even though it could not penetrate. A second later one of the walking sentries appeared ahead and cast his long spear straight at Arthur's face. That one he dodged. But the sentry, a brave warrior, drew his stabbing spear and charged.

Behind them the paralysis of fear was broken. The *Cardi* poured after the humans in a stream, whooping and yelling. The sentry stabbed at Arthur's face, danced back, thrust again. More spears thudded against his back. Arthur walked steadily on, as though the killer in front of him did not exist. And then a long spear handle was thrust between his legs, and he stumbled and went down. As he fell Arthur turned and landed on his good shoulder, keeping the worst of the impact off Carol.

The last of their fear of the unknown gone, the small warriors piled on Arthur in a tangle of fighting hairy bodies. Hands caught at the breathing mask, ripped it away. There were startled cries when he was recognized, and the loud laughter that follows relief from terror. Small hard fists beat at his face.

A rope appeared; this time they bound Arthur's feet at once. The humans were dragged back to the fire. The hilarity continued, growing almost manic in its intensity. The laughing hunters added fresh wood to the fire, extended its width, and drove two more forked poles for a second spit.

Relative calm returned after a time. The leader of the group appeared and held a spear at Arthur's throat, while they untied him and peeled off the bush suit. The *Cardi* carefully examined it, including holding a foot in the fire. There were cries of satisfaction when the tough material refused to burn. Superstitious or not, these people had a realistic attitude toward the physical world.

Before his hands were bound again, Arthur slowly lifted them to his chest. He unhooked the tiny claws of his Protector, and gently laid it aside. The pet was dead. The heat from the fire, the pain it had shared with him, and the mass hysteria and then blood-lust in the minds around them had been more than it could bear. Arthur had felt its pain when it stiffened in the final agony of death, as they were being dragged back to the fire.

Two guards were stationed by the captive humans as preparations continued for an expanded meal. Arthur could feel the heat of the larger fire

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on his face. The pain in his foot was now a throbbing, tormenting presence.

"Art, it was a nice try. I love you," Carol whispered.

"We aren't done yet," he whispered back. "I brought a handful of shells in my pouch. If I can work my hands loose, I'll throw them in the fire. While they're popping off. . ."

"I think we're done, my love. Or we will be, after an hour over that fire. *Oh, God!. . .*" she broke off with a sob, but swiftly recovered. "I wish I could laugh about that awful joke and go out that way. Don't they cut the throats first, to bleed the animal? *Oh, Arthur!*"

He said what he could to comfort her, and they waited for the butcher with the stone knife.

The interrupted dance had been resumed; the fire pit needed time to burn down again. The small clearing became a place of flickering shadows, loud rhythmic chants, and the stamping of small feet. The preparations seemed to last forever, while Arthur and Carol lay and whispered their goodbys. But it could not have been more than an hour before their butcher walked toward them. It was the party leader, carrying a spear ornamented with feathers. Their slaughter would be ceremonial as well as functional.

Knowing he would be first, Arthur wriggled closer to Carol. They managed to kiss. Strangely, the guards made no effort to separate them.

The chanting and dancing intensified, nearing a dramatic climax. The two guards seized Arthur and laid him over a convenient log, head low and throat up. The short feathered spear flashed before his eyes, moving in a hypnotic dance of its own. . .and from the beach side of camp came a great roar of sound, a thunderous bellow from many huge lungs. A horde of giant yellow bodies came hurtling into the firelight, smashing aside the lone sentry who courageously opposed them.

The guards and chief turned to fight. Arthur slid to the ground and hastily rolled over, working to free his hands. He saw a clearing that seemed filled to overflowing with *Thumesin* males, their great bulks blocking out the firelight. All carried long clubs and held large wooden shields with the free arm. Their reach exceeded that of the small men with the stabbing spears, who seemed like children before them. Warrior after warrior fell, clubbed unconscious. A few of the yellow giants took wounds, but those that Arthur saw seemed minor. In three minutes the fight was over, the last

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

standing *Cardi* warrior trying to flee and being knocked unconscious.

A huge presence appeared by Arthur, and a stone knife severed his bonds. He recognized Regor. And that was Stanil freeing Carol. As he rose, flexing numbed hands, Arthur saw his friends of a year busily binding the unconscious carnivores.

Regor was smiling at him. Feeling lost, Arthur asked, "My friend, how did you. . .?"

"We will talk later," said Regor. "For now, best attend to your small mate."

Carol cried for only a moment before drawing back, trying to regain her self-control. Regor motioned for them to follow and headed for the beach. One canoe was already in the water, and tall yellow forms emerged from the brush with the other three. More *Thumesin* were bringing the bound carnivores to the beach and laying them along the shore. Arthur saw one stir and sit up, obviously dazed. He received a firm tap on the head with a club and collapsed again.

"Arthur! Thank heavens you two are all right!" Fred Yardley suddenly appeared by the humans. He was carrying the standard rifle. "Wanted to go in with Regor and the rest, but they wouldn't let me. And was told I couldn't fire my rifle unless attacked! Fat chance, when they made me wait at the beach."

"They didn't seem to need any help, Fred," said Carol, her voice sharp.

The limp forms of the *Cardi* were being distributed over the boats. The humans watched as huge hands seized the slim canoes. The tall herbivores walked the four boats far into the water and gave them a final shove. Even without the sails the steady easterly breeze started carrying them homeward.

Regor was by their side again. Arthur suddenly realized that the giant's Protector, as usual, clung to his neck. He would have expected the pets to be left behind. But as best he could tell in the dim light, Regor's was no more white than usual.

The round humanoid saw Arthur's stare, and laughed. "We do not fight in anger, my friend. And even the blood-lust of the little brown devils means nothing when they are unconscious."

Arthur finally thought of a sensible question. "If you can fight like that, could you not hit a little harder and kill? The *Cardi* will be back, and in larger numbers."

"We do not think so," Regor said gravely. "When they awaken and finally untie

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

themselves, they will be at sea. From there they will sail home. And we believe that their tale of how they were set upon by terrible yellow giants, to whom they were as helpless children, will become a legend among all who speak their language. We think more would come if they did *not* return. So our fathers have told us, and so we believe."

"I see," said Arthur. And indeed he did.

"It seems the *Cardi* have landed here in the past, Arthur," broke in Fred. "Mariners blown off course by storms, and so on. Been sending 'em back this way for many generations. If the *Cardi* had a homogeneous culture, as these people do, the legend would already have spread over their whole continent."

In Fred's voice was the admission that he and WorldTec had been wrong. The *Thumesin* understood their environment, and their neighbors, far better than the men from Earth. They would need no arrowheads for defense against the *Cardi*, nor meat in their diet. This ancient contest between herbivore and carnivore would find its resolution over centuries, not years, but Arthur could follow it throughout his lifetime.

He had a feeling that on this planet the old story would have a different ending.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS ON THE MOVE

Will you put yourself in the place of a copy of F&SF for a moment? A copy that is mailed to your home, only to find that you have moved. Is it forwarded to you? *No.* Is it returned to us? *No.* Instead, a post office regulation decrees that it must be. . .thrown away! We are notified of this grim procedure and charged ten cents for each notification. Multiply this aimless ending by hundreds each month and we have a doubly sad story: copies that do nobody any good, and a considerable waste of money to us, money which we would much prefer to spend on new stories. With your help, this situation can be changed. *If you are planning a change of address, please notify us six weeks in advance. If possible, enclose a label from a recent issue, and be sure to give us both your old and new address, including the zip codes.*

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE, MERCURY PRESS, Inc., P. O. Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

All except new readers will be familiar with the byline of Robert F. Young, who appeared regularly in these pages in the 50's and 60's (e.g., "Jonathan and the Space Whale," "In What Cavern of the Deep," "L'Arc De Jeanne.") Mr. Young writes: "For the past five or six years I have been working full-time as a castings inspector in a non-ferrous foundry, and although I write both weekends and evenings, my output is considerably less than what it used to be." We hope to have Mr. Young back on a more or less regular basis, and you will too after reading . . .

Remnants of Things Past

by ROBERT F. YOUNG

IF IT SURPRISED HAVERS to find that he could return to the past, the past surprised him even more. It wasn't at all what he expected. He had always pictured the past as a sort of old movie through whose nostalgic scenes the intrepid time traveler wended his carefree way till he came to the one he wanted to revisit. It simply hadn't occurred to him that the past by its very nature must of necessity be dead, nor had it occurred to him that the piling up of historical events and the concomitant piling up of people and places might have imposed severe restrictions with regard to how much of a given person's existence could be retained, as well as have dictated the method of retention. As a result he was somewhat disconcerted when, after opening the strange door that had suddenly appeared before him and stepping across its threshold, he found himself in a rather ordinary windowless room.

After reflecting on the matter, Havers could see the need for such economy. The room was about twenty feet in length, some fifteen in width and approximately nine in height. The ceiling was concave and consisted of 12″-by-12″ ceiling blocks made of a luminous material that bathed everything beneath in a pale but penetrating radiance. The floor consisted of 4″-by-4″ linoleum tiles, red and black in color, and patterned like a checkerboard. The walls were covered with 9′-by-4′ walnut-veneer panels.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Floor-to-ceiling shelves began on the left-hand wall, ran almost all the way around the room with but a single interruption. The interruption was a door directly opposite the one Havers had entered by. Above it glowed a red exit sign of the sort seen in old movie theaters. Against the wall to his right stood two cabinets, one gray, the other rose-colored, and centered in front of the wall to his left was a small plaster-of-Paris pedestal.

In the middle of the room stood a round display counter. Its shelves and top were glass and were covered with a wide variety of objects that Havers from his present position could not identify. It was clear to him, however, that whatever they were they must have played important roles in his past in order to rate such prominent display.

He walked over to the counter and stood before it. The first item to catch his eye was the novel he had never quite got around to finishing. It constituted the countertop's centerpiece and was appealingly bound with red morocco, with the title and his byline stamped in gold letters:

THE CASH AND THE CREDIT
by
George Waverley Havers

Havers picked up the book and opened it. Appropriately enough, all of the pages were blank except four, one of which was the title page and the other three of which contained the text proper as far as he had got. Turning to page 1, he began to read: *Ere we look into the brain of Elijah Thorne and examine one by one the machinations we are certain to find there, it might be well to dwell for a moment upon the physique and physiognomy of our hero, the one ectomorphic, the other dolichocephalic. We—* Quickly Havers closed the book and replaced it on the counter.

To the left of it, artistically arranged in black plastic racks, were the pipes he had collected in the years following World War II and had somehow lost track of during the '50s and the '60s. There were briers, meerschaums, corncobs, Yello-boles and Kaywoodies. He stared at them in mild astonishment. Why in the world had he, a cigarette smoker, wasted time and money collecting pipes?

From the pipe collection his gaze moved to an object he could not at first recognize. It was yellowish-brown in color, shaped like an oversized, extremely thick pancake, and deeply indented in the center. Could it be? Yes, yes it was:—the catcher's mitt his father had given him on his ninth birthday. Why, he hadn't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seen it in ages! Ironically, seeing it now evoked not nostalgia, but repugnance. He had never really liked baseball, although he had played it sedulously and made the high-school team.

Next to the mitt lay his high-school diploma, next to that, reducing it to puerile insignificance, lay the gaudy yard-long vellum scroll he had received upon graduating from The Successful Businessmen's Institute. Slowly he circled the counter, taking in the articles on the shelves as well as those on the top. They included (among innumerable other things) a tarnished Zippo cigarette lighter, an Asiatic-Pacific Theater Service medal with two Bronze Stars, a Good Conduct Medal, a Philippines Liberation Ribbon, a package of Gillette razor blades, a Mobilgas credit card, a Flexible Flier sled, a standard Royal typewriter with the letter "G" missing, a Boy Scout knife with four blades, a pair of booster cables, a Japanese geisha doll, a discolored basketball, a red coaster wagon, a bottle opener, a 1962 Currier & Ives calendar, a carpenter's rule, a mildewed Polaroid Land camera, a calorie chart, a copy of *Tom Swift and his Motorcycle*, and a Happy New Year horn.

Many of the objects were meaningless to him; some he could not even remember. All of them were possessions that had long ago lost their value, if indeed they had had any to begin with. It was as though whoever had chosen them had done so with the intention of making his life seem trivial, whereas actually it had been as rich and full as a man could want.

However, they constituted only a minute portion of the room's contents. There were the shelves to be explored yet, and the two cabinets. The shelves seemed the most promising, and he walked over to where they began. As he did so, he noticed that there was a framed sampler centered on the wall above the empty pedestal. He expected to see a familiar apothegm embroidered on the cloth, such as *I dreamed last night that Life was Beauty; I woke to find that Life was Duty*, or *Early to bed, early to rise, Makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.* Instead, he saw a nursery rhyme:

Hickory, dickory dock,
The mouse ran up the clock,
The clock struck one,
The mouse ran down;
Hickory, dickory dock.

He removed his gaze from the sampler and confronted the first section of shelves.

Proust, after tasting his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

petite madeleine, had proceeded to recapture his past. Havers had no such intention with regard to his. When the strange door had appeared before him, he had known instantly that it provided access to his yesteryears; but in opening it and stepping across its threshold, he had been prompted by curiosity alone. Despite the richness and the fullness of his life, he had no real desire to relive any of it, either on paper or in actuality. He had always prided himself on his ability to take everything in his stride. He would take his past in his stride also.

Nevertheless, the shelves before which he had halted disconcerted him. They were lined with dolls.

Why dolls? He had never collected dolls.

Then, looking at them more closely, he saw that they weren't ordinary dolls but miniature models, ranging in height from 7 to 8 inches, of the most important people in his life. A representative collection, so to speak, of his relatives, friends and acquaintances.

Choosing one at random, he took it down so he could see it better. It was Dick Evans, who, up until a few years ago when the booze had finally overtaken him and Payne Westbrook had fired him, had occupied the office next to Havers' at Westbrook Co., Inc. Havers put Dick back and took down another doll. It was Payne Westbrook himself, tall, cold, correct, face sun-lamp tanned as always. Curious as to what kind of material the dolls were stuffed with, Havers pulled Payne Westbrook's right arm off. A cloud of fine yellow flakes drifted down to the floor. Just as he had thought: Sawdust.

He replaced Westbrook and, leaning forward, began peering at the homunculi one by one. He had difficulty identifying some of them, but most of them he recognized at first glance: Miss Trout, his fourth-grade teacher. Winston Barnes, his phys-ed teacher. John LaCrosse, his roommate while attending The Successful Businessmen's Institute. Virgie Harrington, Payne Westbrook's private secretary. Havers' father. Havers' mother. Havers' son Wesley. Peggy Phelps, the girl Havers had worshiped from afar during his senior year in high school and who had been caught *in flagrante delicto* with Ralph Collins in the boiler room, and expelled. Ralph Collins.

He had difficulty identifying the next doll. It was a tall young man with auburn hair, brown eyes and rather large ears. At last the truth struck him: he was looking at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

himself—not as he was now, but as he had been the year he married Jennifer. Had he really been so thin in those days?

He knew who the next doll would be, but he still had trouble recognizing it. Had Jennifer really been as stunning as all that when they were first married? He took the doll down for a better look. Those clear blue eyes, those willowy legs, that buttercup-colored hair . . . all he could think of was a lovely Barbie doll. He felt suddenly cheated, not by life but by time. The girl in his hand bore little or no relationship to the tall gaunt female of the species—withdrawn, remote, in the midst of menopause—he lived with now.

He returned the Barbie doll to the shelf and moved on to the next section. It was devoted to miniatures of the electrical appliances and the radios and TV sets he and Jennifer had gone through during the twenty-three years of their marriage and to the portable TVs and radios they had bought for Wesley. They looked like toys sitting there on the shelves—toys little girls get for Christmas and play with on Christmas morning. The next section was devoted to miniatures of the cars he had owned. He was astonished at their number. How had he, a man of modest income, been able to afford all those tons and tons of steel and chrome? They, too, had a toylike aspect and brought to mind the toy autos little boys play with on sidewalks. All that was lacking was a toy fire truck.

He had reached the door with the exit sign above it, and he stood for a while regarding its mute panels before moving on. The next section made him think of a doll house. This was because the shelves contained miniature household furnishings. Bedroom suites, living-room suites, kitchen stoves, kitchen cabinets, dining-room sets, buffets, highboys, lamps, rugs, footstools, hassocks, magazine stands, end tables, lavatories, bathtubs, medicine cabinets. There was even a toy commode. No, two of them. The next section had only two shelves and exhibited miniatures of the two houses he had bought since his marriage. The one on the top shelf was a shoe-boxlike affair, which he had hated. The one on the bottom shelf was the rambling ranch style which he and Jennifer lived in now and which he hated even more.

The final section featured miniature wardrobes—his, Jen's and Wesley's. In his case, the clothing dated from the day of his birth, and in Wesley's, too. What Jennifer had worn before he met her had no bearing on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his life and was therefore not included. He stared at all the tiny coats and dresses, at all the tiny shoes. They were remnants only in the sense—as were the furniture, the cars, and the appliances—that they were all that remained of his past.

He had come, finally, to the two cabinets.

The first one appeared to be an ordinary filing cabinet and probably contained files listing and describing the room's contents. A glance inside proved such to be the case.

The second cabinet was by far the more intriguing. Its rose color, he saw now, did not derive from paint but from rose-colored radiance emanating beyond its translucent paneling. Fascinated, he walked over and stood before it. It was about four feet in height, and the upper part slanted back at a 45-degree angle and contained a large rectangular window. A ledge consisting of maroon keys, some with numbers on them, some with letters, ran along the window's base. Just to the right of the ledge was a small red button labeled CANCEL. At length it dawned on Havers that he was looking at a jukebox.

He stood there, staring. What in the world was a jukebox doing in his past?

Peering through the window into the lighted interior, he saw a horizontal rack containing fifteen records, a little mechanical arm for pulling them out, and a felt-covered disk with a smaller arm suspended above it. Arranged laterally along the lower part of the window were two rows of small white cards with titles typed on them.

Eagerly Havers leaned forward. Here were the songs of his boyhood, here were the romantic melodies of his youth. Presently he frowned. For the titles did not pertain to songs; they pertained—or at least they seemed to—to episodes in his past: *What Miss Trout told the Class not to do at the Picnic* (A-1); *To Peggy Phelps, a poem by George W. Havers* (A-2); *Why George Washington deserves to be called the Father of his Country: Valedictory Address by G. W. Havers* (A-3); *Warscape, with Frieze of Whores* (B-1); *The Pom-pom Girl's Lament* (B-2); *The Successful Institute's Businessman* (B-3): *Westbrook Co., Inc., makes Room for one More* (C-1); *****Jennifer***** (C-2); *A Son is Born* (C-3); *Havers works his Way up the Ladder of Success: Hi-lites of the '50s and '60s* (D-1); *The Haverses at Table: a Charming* tête-à-tête *betwixt Husband and Wife* (D-2); *Dick Evans at the Roadside Bar & Grill: a Joycean Rhapsody* (D-3); *A Father Counsels his Son on the Eve of*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the latter's Departure for the Halls of Higher Learning (E-1); *Payne Westbrook painlessly applies the Shaft: Excerpts from an After-dinner Speech delivered at the 25-year-men's Banquet* (E-2); Chez *Shaman* (E-3).

Havers was indignant. It was as though whoever was responsible for assembling his past had not been content merely to belittle his life but had felt the need to mock it too.

In spite of himself, he was also intrigued. He could not remember, and did not care, what Miss Trout had told the class not to do at the picnic, but the Peggy Phelps selection fascinated him. Had he really written a poem to that silly sex-crazed girl all those years ago?

He searched for a coin slot, but none seemed to exist. Apparently the selections were for free. He depressed keys A and 2. The voice that presently emanated from the speaker was his own of long ago, and he remembered suddenly how he had penned the poem one winter's night and had recited it afterward in his room up under the eaves—

To Peggy Phelps

"Peggy, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicean barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, wayworn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.
On desperate seas long wont to roam—"

Havers jabbed the cancellation button. He might at least have written an *original* poem!

He skipped *Why George Washington deserves to be called the Father of His Country* and *Warscape, with Frieze of Whores*, and played B-2.

The Pom-pom Girl's Lament

"Wan peso, two pesos, three pesos—for you, eeze no enough. You peek me out an you com een to my room weeth me, an now you no wanna make love. You strange Americano. For strange Americanos the price eeze five pesos, even eef they no make love. You pay me five pesos queekly, or I tell the other Americanos you not a man. I work hard all day. I need more pesos to buy food and new clothes weeth. Look, I lay down here all ready for you, an you no jump on. What kind Americano are you? Jump on—I show you extra good time for five pesos. Wan peso, two pesos, three pesos, eeze . . ."

As the lament went on, Havers saw in his mind the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

squalid little room with its windowless bamboo walls, the benchlike bamboo bed with the Filipino whore lying on it, her calico dress pulled up to her waist . . . and he saw himself standing there in big combat boots and GI khakis and silly little overseas hat, all of nineteen years old; and then he saw himself toss five wadded-up bills on the bed and drop his khaki trousers and throw himself upon the grinning girl; and simultaneously the record ended and silence reclaimed the room that held the remnants of his past.

He skipped *The Successful Institute's Businessman* (he didn't care to be reminded of how consummately he'd been conned), *Westbrook Co., Inc., makes Room for one More* (he didn't care to be reminded that he'd started out as a $50-a-week clerk either), ****Jennifer**** (that Barbie doll again!), *A Son is Born* (the fact was sufficient unto itself), *Havers works his Way up the Ladder of Success: Hi-lites of the '50s and '60s* (he'd had his fill of the '50s and '60s), and played *The Haverses at Table: A Charming* tête-à-tête betwixt Husband and Wife, not because he wanted to hear it but because he was curious why so commonplace an occurrence had been included.

The Haverses at Table

"Where's Wes?"

"He'll be late."

"It seems to me he could manage to have *one* meal a day with his mother and father, Jen. Say, that meat loaf looks good."

"He wants to borrow the car tonight. To take Vicki to the movies."

"I thought he took her last night."

"That was Sandy."

"Hmf . . .I think I'll have another helping of potatoes, Jen. And another slice of that loaf . . . I made up my mind today. We're going to get a color TV."

"That's nice."

"It's embarrassing when people drop in and they see that broken-down black-and-white job sitting in the corner. Anyway, there's no excuse for us not getting a new one now."

"That's good, George."

"I said there's no excuse for us not getting a new one *now*."

"Yes, George?"

"I don't think you get the significance of the 'now'. So I guess I'd better fill you in on the good news: This morning Payne Westbrook called me into his office and told me I'm to be the new general manager. Carl Jacobs is retiring next month, and I'm next in line for the job. Well, almost next, anyway. Actually Dick Evans has been

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with the firm longer than I have, but he can't be depended on any more. He even keeps a bottle in his desk now, as well as the usual one in the water closet. Payne told me—confidentially, so don't breathe a word of this to anyone, Jen—that if Dick doesn't straighten out soon, he's going to do more than just pass him over for the general manager's job—he's going to let him go altogether."

"How awful."

"I know. I don't know what's come over him. He always drank, but before he always managed to control it. Now he can't—or else he doesn't want to. Anyway, Jen, I've finally made it to the top of the ladder."

"That's good."

"It was a long hard climb, but at last I'm there."

"That's nice."

"We'll send Wes to the best college in the country."

"That's fine."

"I think I'll have another helping of those peas."

This time, Havers didn't skip:

Dick Evans at the
Roadside Bar & Grill

"So you gave me the shaft old buddy Im still your fren and I wunt steer you wrong and thats why Im telling you now dont trust that old bastard hell screw you too like he did me thats the name of the game old buddy George screw them first or theyll screw you another drink Ferdie make it two cant you see the whole things no frigging good George cant you see we dont live our own lives the only time I ever do what I want to do is when Im drunk which is pretty often these days Ill admit all the rest of the time before I do something I think first of how what Im going to do will look to other people will they approve of it or wont they this way I dont give a damn Im free if they dont like what I do screw them wheres those drinks Ferdie honest to God its crazy a guy has only one life to live one frigging little life and he wastes it wondering if somebody else approves of the way hes living it he sees a nice dish walking down the street that hed like to make but does he go after her oh-no he thinks suppose his wife finds out and what will his neighbors think and so he lets her go by even if she looks at him and he knows he can make her he sees these kids these days doing just what they want to do and to hell with everybody else and he says its scandalous and kids werent like that in his day youre damn right they werent they were scared of what

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

everybody would think except now and then maybe when they broke loose for a little while they grew up to be people like us George people without any lives of their own people governed by other people people governing each other sneaking out every now and then and doing what they really want to do and all the rest of the time putting on the big show and when the shows over what have we got who the hell will remember what we did or didnt do or give a good goddamn wheres those drinks Ferdie what kind of service you got in this stinking place WHERES THOSE DRINKS I tell you George we've thrown our lives into a big filthy wastebasket—of a world that doesn't know us from two rolls of toilet paper."

Havers watched the little mechanical arm pick up the record and return it to the horizontal rack. Poor Dick, he thought. What terrible wind had torn him from the dock where he'd been so safely moored and blown him out to sea?

Perhaps the mooring line had been defective. Dick had never really settled down—not in the sense that Havers had. He had had three wives to Havers' one, and none of the marriages had worked out. Maybe he had been fore-doomed from the beginning to be blown out to sea.

After that night at the Roadside Bar & Grill, Havers had never seen him again.

Next, Havers played E-1.

A Father Counsels his Son on the Eve of the latter's Departure for the Halls of Higher Learning

"I guess I don't have to tell you, Wes, that your mother and I have high hopes for you."

"I have high hopes for me, too."

"We've been lucky. We've never had to suffer the embarrassment and the humiliation so many of your schoolmates have caused their parents. It's a tribute to your character that you've avoided the paths so many young people take today."

"I want the goodies. And you don't get them by going on trips and feeling sorry for yourself and playing trumpet in minority bands."

"The goodies are fine, Wes, but there's more to living a rich full life than the mere amassing of possessions."

"You don't have to worry—I'll follow the rules. But not because I'm afraid to break them, like you. Someday I'll even get married and have children. But it's the goodies that I want most."

"That—that girl you've been

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dating lately—Lola, I think her name is. She seems quite nice. Might make you a nice wife—after you get your degree, of course, and become established with some major firm."

"Her? She's just an easy lay. Like all the rest of them. When I get married I'm not going to have to lie awake nights and wonder how many guys laid my wife before I did. I'm going to know that no one did. When you play the game for keeps, you play it different."

"You—you seem to know exactly what you want."

"I do. And what I want is exactly the same things those freakouts I went to school with want. They only pretend they want something else, and the reason they pretend is that they're afraid—afraid they can't compete, afraid they can't cope. So they console themselves by stealing frosting from the cake now and then and licking it off their fingers, but all the while they know the cake is there, and they hate it because they can't get any of it. I'll get my share of it. You wait and see."

It had been the first time Havers had ever really seen his son, and afterward he had wondered how this utter stranger happened to be living in his house. He had gone to bed unnerved and hadn't slept well. In the morning he had driven Wes to the airport, and he and Jennifer had said good-by to the tall determined young man who had Jennifer's mouth and Havers' eyes and someone else's soul.

Payne Westbrook painlessly applies the Shaft

"There are outsiders in our society, gentlemen, who condemn employees who remain with the same organization all their lives, implying that they do so because of a lack of imagination, because of a sense of security, because of a need for a father figure. All of you sitting here tonight, gentlemen, give the lie to such implications. The word that describes you best is not 'fearful' but 'faithful.'

"What would our organization be like without employees like you? What would this country be like? It would fall apart, gentlemen, because you are the mesons that hold it together. For what is society but a great big atom, its nucleus the corporations and industries and institutions that make possible our way of life. Without loyal employees—mesons—like you holding this nucleus together, it would fly apart, and we would have chaos. Is this what your

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

detractors want when they shoot barbed arrows, their heads dipped in malice, into your midst? No. The bows from which their arrows are launched are strung with the gut strings of jealousy. They level criticisms at you because they envy you. Anyone of them would give his right arm to be the recipient of one of the 25-year pins I am going to hand out tonight."

"I would like to pay particular tribute to our strongest meson of all—our Main Meson, so to speak—a man who has done more to hold our mesonic organization (if I may coin a term) together than any other. I am referring of course to our dependable, reliable and steadfast general manager, George Havers. Not only has he given our concern his very best throughout these past two and a half decades, he has also become a pillar of his community. He has a fine wife, and together they have reared a fine upstanding son, who at this very moment is trodding the Halls of Higher Learning in search of Eternal Truths and High Ideals with which to live a rich full life like his father's."

"In closing, I would like to make mention of a new echelon which will shortly be introduced into our organization. It will be called the Interliaison Department and will exist between the Main Office and the Office of General Manager. It will be headed by my grandson, Payne Westbrook II, who has just completed a high-intensity course in business administration and is eminently qualified for the post."

Havers regarded the final selection. Chez *Shaman.* A great weariness had overtaken him, clouding his mind and making it impossible for him to connect the curious title with any particular past moment. If he could have made the connection, he would not have played the record; as it was, he only played part of it—

Chez *Shaman*

"I thought for a minute there that you were going to tell me I only had six more months to live."

"How long you live, George, will depend a lot on you. If you stick religiously to your diet, keep those pills handy at all times, avoid overexertion and overexcitement, you'll live as long as your next-door neighbor. In fact, you'll probably live longer than I will."

"That diet's going to be torture. Can't I have even *one* egg for breakfast?"

"Definitely not. Eggs are one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of your worst enemies . . . Why don't you buy a bicycle and peddle to work instead of driving your car? It might do wonders for you."

"A bicycle! Me, a middle-aged businessman peddle to work on a bicycle? I can just see myself parking it in the parking lot between Payne Westbrook's Cadillac and Payne Westbrook II's Jaguar! Me, the Main Meson!"

"The main what?"

"Nothing, doc. Just a private thorn in my side."

After canceling the selection, Havers felt himself sway. Simultaneously his vision blurred. When it cleared, he saw that there was a small white card Scotch-taped on the jukebox window.

Funny he hadn't noticed it before.

Peering closer, he saw that there were words typed on it:

We hope that your visit has been a pleasant one and that your effects are arranged to your satisfaction. We trust you will forgive us for having taken a few liberties here and there with the material. It is our policy whenever possible to lend zest to our pastrooms and to have them convey a message.

When you are ready to depart, please use the door marked "Exit."

—The Management

Havers read the words again. They told him no more than they had the first time.

For all their politeness, he felt somehow that he was being patronized. He would *not* use the exit door. He would leave by the same door he had come in by.

Moreover, he would leave this very moment.

He stepped over to the door. For the first time he noticed that it had no knob. Perhaps it was a swinging door. He pushed against it with all his strength, but it was as unyielding as a brick wall. Next, he tried to insert his fingers between it and the jamb. There was barely enough space to insert his fingernails. He stepped back, defeated.

Again he felt himself sway. Again his vision blurred. When it cleared, he saw that the pedestal standing against the wall between the door and the first section of shelves was no longer empty. There was a doll standing on it—a doll slightly larger than the homunculi on the shelves; a doll wearing a dark-gray business suit, a striped dress shirt, a blue tie, and alligator shoes. The tie was sloppily tied and hung outside the little coat.

Havers stared at the doll. Except for the difference in size, its apparel duplicated the suit, shirt, tie and shoes he was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wearing this very moment, that he had donned that very morning before going downstairs to breakfast. It updated the Havers doll on the shelf, reflected in miniature, save for the awry tie, the way he looked now.

(Funny he couldn't remember *eating* breakfast.)

As he stood there staring at the homunculus, he became gradually aware of the silence. He had noticed it only absently when he had first entered the room, and his preoccupation with the visual remnants of his past had relegated it to the back of his mind; later, the vocal remnants had counteracted it. Now it filled the room, and he could feel it all around him. It was the first *true* silence he had ever known. He couldn't even hear himself breathe . . .

He remembered the pain then—the fiery terrible pain that had torn through his chest and surged down his left arm as he was going downstairs to breakfast. That was when the strange door had appeared before him and provided access to his past.

He wasn't particularly surprised. In a way he had known all along that he was dead.

He looked around the room. At the objects on the display counter; at the contents of the shelves; at the jukebox, its multivoice stilled, standing mutely against the wall. Presently he found himself staring at the exit door.

You couldn't fight "The Management" any more than you could fight city hall.

He found it odd that he could accept death so easily. Perhaps it was because he had never truly been alive.

He took a step toward the door, paused. Going over to the pedestal, he retied the Havers homunculus' tie and tucked it neatly inside the little coat. Then he walked across the room, opened the door, and exited.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE CINDERELLA COMPOUND

THERE IS AN ORGANIZATION that has computerized scientific citations. In a particular field of science, they will go through the pertinent papers and study the earlier papers to which each refers, and then those to which those earlier papers refer and so on. Some papers are cited more often than others, and it is possible to work out a network, with the help of the computer, which will show the key references; the great watersheds that turn the current of science in a new direction.

Naturally, the organization wanted to know if by merely counting and organizing references they were getting a true picture of the advance of science. Therefore, they planned to compare their results with the picture presented in some book about the field which gave the historic overlook as seen through the eyes of some keen-eyed scientist. In that way, the computer would be matched against the judgement and intuition of a qualified human expert.

I found out about this

ISAAC ASIMOV

SCIENCE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

because, a number of years ago, the organization wrote to tell me about it. They had decided to use molecular biology as their field for testing (that being just about the most exciting branch of science in the quarter-century following World War II), and the book they were planning to use as their standard of comparison was THE GENETIC CODE, published in 1962, and written by—all together now—Isaac Asimov.

Naturally, I turned green, but before you all die of suspense, let me tell you there was a happy ending. The diagram drawn from my book and the diagram worked out by the computer matched very closely.

They shouted with triumph because they thought it showed how good their computerization program was. *I* panted with relief because I wasn't shown up as something less than qualified.

But what interested me most of all was that the computer and I had agreed on the one key finding that served to channel all research in a new direction. —Yet the scientist who was responsible for that finding remains unknown to the general public. A dozen men in the field have received Nobel Prizes for exploring the new road he had pointed out—but not he himself. Some men have become almost household words in consequence—but not he himself.

So let me tell you what it was that computer and I agreed upon, especially since it will tie in with the previous two columns. To do that, let's begin by going back a century.

In 1869, a Swiss biochemist, Johann Friedrich Miescher, only 25 years old at the time, found that cell nuclei seemed rather resistant to the action of pepsin, an enzyme which acts to break up proteins. From the nucleus, he located sizable quantities of something which, whatever it was, was not protein. Considering the source, he called it "nuclein."

Miescher analyzed nuclein and found it contained both nitrogen and phosphorus. At once Ernst Felix Hoppe-Seyler, the German biochemist under whom Miescher was working, clamped down on the discovery and wouldn't let it be published for two years. This was not because he had some foreboding as to the great importance of the discovery. It was because until then only one other compound ever isolated from living tissue had proved to have both nitrogen and phosphorus atoms in its molecule and that was lecithin—which Hoppe-Seyler himself had discovered.

Hoppe-Seyler, being human as well as a biochemist, didn't like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to have the uniqueness of his discovery lightly smashed, and it was only till he himself had completely confirmed Miescher's work that he let the news out of the laboratory.

Eventually, nuclein was found to show a pronounced acid reaction, so the name was changed to "nucleic acid."

In 1879, another of Hoppe-Seyler's students, Albrecht Kossel, began to break up the nucleic acid structure and to identify some of the smaller fragments he obtained. He found a number of compounds with molecules composed of rings of both carbon and nitrogen atoms. These had the chemical names of "purines" and "pyrimidines." There were also sugar molecules present in the mixture of fragments which he could not quite identify.

Kossel's work eventually led to the demonstration that the nucleic acid molecule was made up of a string of smaller units called "nucleotides." Each nucleotide consisted of a purine (or pyrimidine), a sugar, and a phosphorous-oxygen combination called a phosphate.

In a particular nucleic acid molecule there were nucleotides of four different kinds, the important difference lying in the detailed structure of the purine or pyrimidine component. The sugar and the phosphate were the same in all the nucleotides. We needn't bother with the exact chemical names of the different nucleotides. We can just call them 1, 2, 3, and 4.

The man who actually identified the nucleotides as the basic unit of the nucleic acid structure was a Russian-American chemist named Phoebus Aaron Theodor Levene, who had studied under Kossel. In 1909, he identified the sugar in the nucleic acid as "ribose," a five-carbon-atom sugar which had been studied in the laboratory as a synthetic, but had never been found in living tissue.

Then, in 1929, he found that some nucleic acids contained a sugar that was not quite ribose. The new sugar had one oxygen atom less in its molecule than ribose did, so it was called "deoxyribose." Prior to Levene's discovery, deoxyribose had never been known, either in the laboratory or in nature.

Any particular sample of nucleic acid had, among its constituent units, either ribose or deoxyribose, never both. Chemists therefore began to speak of two kinds of nucleic acid: "ribonucleic acid" and "deoxyribonucleic acid," usually abbreviated as "RNA" and "DNA" respectively. Each variety was built up out of nucleotides containing the particular sugar unit characteristic of itself, plus any of four different types of purines

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or pyrimidines. Three of these different types were found in each of the two varieties of nucleic acid. The fourth was different in the two but only slightly. We might say that RNA was built up of 1, 2, 3, and 4a; while DNA was built up of 1, 2, 3, and 4b.

Next question. What were the nucleic acids doing in the body? What was their function?

Whatever it was it had something to do with protein. Kossel had discovered that nucleic acids were associated with protein, and the combination was called "nucleoprotein."

That astonished nobody. In the first third of the 19th Century, the general classes of compounds contained in living tissue were worked out, and one of those classes was found to be the most complicated by far, and the most fragile. That class seemed made up of just the kind of substances you would expect to be involved in something as versatile and delicate as life.

In 1839, the Dutch chemist, Gerardus Johannes Mulder, first applied the word "protein" to this complicated group of compounds. The name comes from a Greek word meaning "of first importance." Mulder had used the name to stress the importance of a particular formula he had worked out for certain protein fragments. The formula proved completely unimportant, but in every succeeding decade for a hundred years, the aptness of the name became steadily more apparent.

By the time nucleic acids were discovered, no biochemist alive doubted that proteins were "of first importance" and were, indeed, the key molecules of life. As the 20th Century wore on, new discoveries seemed to make protein's position in this respect more and more secure. Enzymes, which tightly controlled the chemical reactions within the body, proved to be proteins. Hormones, vitamins, antibiotics, trace minerals (poisons, too, for that matter) all seemed to work, one way or another, through their effect on enzymes.

Proteins were *it*.

The various protein molecules were built up of chains of smaller units called "amino acids." There were some twenty varieties of amino acids, each of which was found in almost every protein.

Some protein molecules were made up of nothing more than a chain of amino acids, and these were called "simple proteins" in a system of classification worked out, to begin with, by Hoppe-Seyler, whom I mentioned earlier. Those protein molecules

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which contained, as more or less minor parts of their molecules, atom groupings that were *not* amino acids, were called "conjugated proteins."

The conjugated proteins were classified further according to the nature of the non-amino-acid portions of the molecule. Where fatty molecules were associated with the protein, the result was a "lipoprotein" or a "lecithoprotein." Carbohydrate attachments gave rise to the classes of "glycoproteins" or "mucoproteins." Where added groups lent color to the protein, the result was "chromoproteins." There were also "phosphoproteins," "metalloproteins" and so on.

One thing biochemists were certain of was that in the case of all the conjugated proteins, it was the protein portion that was the critical part. The non-amino-acid portion, called a "prosthetic group," might have a function, even a crucial function, but somehow it was never considered as more than the tool of the protein portion of the molecule.

The well-known protein, "hemoglobin," for instance, which carries oxygen from lungs to tissue cells, has as its prosthetic group something called "heme." It is the heme which actually picks up the oxygen and transports it. Nevertheless, heme by itself cannot do the job, and abnormal hemoglobins which function badly (as in "sickle cell anemia") don't have anything wrong with the heme, but generally have minor deviations in the amino acid chains of the protein portion of the molecule.

It is as though you were picturing a man using a brush to paint a picture, or an axe to chop down a tree, or a gun to shoot a duck. The tool used may be essential to the function in question, but there can be no doubt that it is the man who counts every time, that the man can do things without tools (and many a simple protein can do important work), but tools can do nothing without man.

It was customary to think of prosthetic groups as comparatively small and stable molecules fit to perform some simple function, while the protein was a large and delicate molecule, very versatile in its functioning. Because that was the way it clearly was in the case of many conjugated proteins, it was too easily assumed that it had to be that way in the case of nucleoproteins, too. Nucleic acid was considered a small and stable molecule which performed its task under the guidance, so to speak, of the protein.

Even as late as 1939, when I was studying organic chemistry at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Columbia, I was taught that the nucleic acid molecule was a "tetranucleotide"; that is, a molecule made up of a string of four nucleotides, one of each kind: 1-2-3-4.

A tetranucleotide is middling large for an organic molecule, but it is only about 1/50 as large as an average protein molecule. Nucleic acid, therefore, was easily and casually dismissed as just a protein-auxiliary; a kind of Cinderella compound sitting in the ashes, while big sister, Protein, went sweeping off to the ball.

Of course, no one knew exactly what it was that nucleic acid did, but whatever it was, biochemists were certain that it had to be something routine. They persisted in thinking this even though nucleic acids were found in some pretty important places. It turned out that the chromosome threads in the nucleus consisted of nucleoproteins, for instance, and the chromosomes were made up of strings of "genes" which controlled the inheritance of physical characteristics—a pretty basic job.

That didn't shake anyone. Those little tetranucleotides undoubtedly had some cute little genetic function, but whatever that might be, it clearly had to be the protein of the chromosomes that controlled the physical characteristics of the body. Only the protein molecule could be complicated enough to do so.

But then it turned out that the nucleic acid molecule might not be as small as it appeared. In isolating the nucleic acid from cells, and in tearing it loose from whatever it was hanging onto, it was broken into small fragments. Gentler treatment was devised which resulted in larger fragments being obtained, and still larger. It began to appear that nucleic acid molecules might be rather on the large side indeed.

That didn't shake anyone, either. If the molecule was large, it just meant that the tetranucleotides repeated themselves: 1-2-3-4-1-2-3-4-1-2. . .and so on forever, with easy breaking-points every four nucleotides, rather like a perforated chain of stamps. And if that were so, the nucleic acids still couldn't be complicated enough to be very important in the living scheme of things.

All this insistence on concentrating on protein and overlooking nucleic acid could only be achieved by more-or-less ignoring a major and very peculiar finding reported in 1896 by Kossel.

He was studying sperm, which are rich in nucleic acid. It isn't hard to see why they must be rich in nucleic acid. Since sperm carry the substances controlling the inheritance of physical characteristics (else how is it that youngsters so frequently

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

resemble their fathers in this or that aspect of their appearance), they must contain at least one half-set of the paternal chromosomes. (On fertilizing the egg cell, the sperm half-set combines with the egg half-set and the young organism inherits a full set, half from one parent, half from the other.)

A sperm cell is so tiny, however, that it just barely has room for that half-set; consequently it must be nearly pure chromosomal material—which is nucleoprotein—and it should be rich in nucleic acid.

Kossel used salmon sperm (easy to get in quantity) and other fish sperm and discovered that the protein contained in them was quite atypical. The molecules were relatively small and relatively simple. Salmon sperm was extreme in this respect, and its chief protein, "salmine" was made up of small molecules containing a single amino acid, one called "arginine," almost to the exclusion of the others. Only ten to twenty percent of the amino acids in salmine were anything other than arginine.

A small protein molecule made up almost entirely of a single amino acid could have none of the vastly intricate complexity of the usual protein molecule of considerably larger size which was made up of up to twenty varieties of amino acids. Could the protein molecules of salmon sperm possibly carry the information required to lead the developing egg in the direction of a large and perfect adult salmon?

Yet on the other hand, the nucleic acid in salmon sperm seemed to be no different from the nucleic acid in other cells.

We might reason as follows: The sperm cell has to swim like mad to get to an egg cell before some other sperm cell makes it. It cannot afford to carry any useless ballast. It must carry only that which is barely essential for inheritance plus just enough fuel for the race and just enough of whatever molecular machinery is required to effect entrance into the egg cell.

Even the chromosomes the sperm carries have to be cut to the bone. If anything can be eliminated without bad effect, let it be eliminated. Time enough to restore it when the sperm is safely inside the egg with a large supply of raw material to draw upon.

So if most of the protein is eliminated from the sperm contents while nucleic acid remains untouched, it might be deduced that the nucleic acid is essential to the transmission of genetic information and protein is not.

Unfortunately, in order to draw that conclusion, biochemists had to abandon a preconception too strong to abandon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Biochemists *knew* that protein was important and nucleic acids weren't, so if they thought about Kossel's findings at all, they decided that the proteins of the sperm, no matter how simple they seemed, somehow managed (once they were safely in the egg cell) to guide the build up of more complex proteins that *did* suffice to carry genetic information.

As for the nucleic acids, they were too small to carry the information and that was that. If the sperm cells insisted on hanging on to a full complement of nucleic acids, that was puzzling—but it simply had to be non-crucial.

The break-through came with studies of the "pneumococcus," the small germ that that causes pneumonia.

There are two strains of these pneumococci, different in appearance through the presence, or absence, of a carbohydrate capsule. The strain in which the capsule was present looked smooth-surfaced; the one that lacked the capsule was rough-surfaced. They were differentiated as the "S strain" and the "R strain" (for smooth and rough, respectively).

The two strains were the same species of bacterium, but the R strain lacked the necessary piece of genetic information required to manufacture the carbohydrate that formed the capsule.

An English bacteriologist, Fred Griffith, had discovered as far back as 1928 that if a sample of S strain, which had been boiled till it was quite dead, was added to a living colony of R strain, then living S strain pneumococci eventually began to appear.

What happened? Surely the dead S strain had not come back to life. A logical explanation short of that would be that when the S strain was killed by boiling, the chemical that carried the necessary genetic information for manufacturing the carbohydrate was *not* destroyed or, at the very least, not entirely destroyed. When the dead S strain was added to the living R strain, the non-destroyed information-chemical was somehow incorporated into the structure of at least some of the living R strain pneumococci, which then began to develop carbohydrate capsules and became S strain.

In 1931, it was found that intact dead bacteria were not needed for the conversion. A quantity of dead S bacteria, soaked in some solvent and filtered off, would leave behind an "extract" containing some of the material in the cells. This extract (containing not a single scrap of intact cell) would nevertheless serve to transform R strain to S strain.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The question was: What was the nature of the information-molecule in the extract that was acting as a "transforming principle." Surely some kind of protein—but it would have to be an unusual one that was capable of surviving boiling water temperatures, which no complex proteins could.

In 1944, an American biochemist, Oswald Theodore Avery, with two co-workers, Colin Munro Macleod, and Maclyn McCarty, purified that extract of transforming principle and finally identified its chemical nature.

It was *not* a protein. It was *pure nucleic acid*—DNA, to be more precise.

That simply transformed everything. It could now be seen that it was the DNA component of chromosomes that was important and the protein component that was merely the auxiliary force, and Kossel's findings concerning sperm protein suddenly made brilliant sense. Nucleic acid was now a Cinderella compound that had reached the ball with a coach and horses, coachmen, and a beautiful gown. Prince Biochemistry fell in love with her at once.

Once biochemists finally looked at DNA instead of dismissing it, advances came thick and fast. The true complexity of its structure was worked out in 1953, and the method by which it stored information that guided the formation of specific enzymes was worked out in the 1960s.

How does this apply to viruses, which we left last month at the moment of crystallization by Stanley?

In 1937, two years after Stanley's demonstration, two British biochemists, Frederick Charles Bawden and Norman W. Pirie, had found that tobacco mosaic virus (the very one which had been the first to be crystallized) was not entirely protein. Some 6 percent of it was nucleic acid of the RNA variety.

At the time, nothing was thought of it since this was before the Avery breakthrough. As time passed, other viruses were found to possess nucleic acid components, either RNA or DNA or, sometimes, both. In fact, every undoubted virus has been found to contain nucleic acid.

Once Avery published his paper that viral nucleic acid was looked on with new eyes, too, and fortunately, biochemistry in the post-war days had a whole battery of new instrumental techniques at hand. Electron microscopes brought viruses into the field of vision, and when x-rays were bounced off them something could be learned about the nature of their molecular structure.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It began to appear that the virus molecule was made up of a container and something which was contained in that container. The container was composed of protein and inside it was the contained—a coil of nucleic acid. The protein began to appear rather like a mere capsule which might contain here and there an enzyme molecule that might help dissolve a cell wall or membrane so that the virus could get inside.

In 1952, two American biochemists, Alfred D. Hershey and M. Chase, tried a crucial experiment with "bacteriophage," a large and complicated virus which had bacterial cells as its chosen prey.

To begin with, bacteria were grown in media that contained both radioactive sulfur atoms and radioactive phosphorus atoms. Both types of atoms were incorporated into the structure of the bacterial cells, and their presence was easily detected by the radiations they emitted. Bacteriophages were then allowed to infest these "tagged" bacteria, and they, too, incorporated radioactive atoms into their structure. Both sulfur and phosphorus were incorporated into the virus protein. Since nucleic acid contained phosphorus, but no sulfur, radioactive phosphorus only was incorporated into the virus nucleic acid.

Finally, the tagged bacteriophages were allowed to infest normal untagged bacteria. After enough time had been allowed for the virus to get into the bacterial cells, those cells were carefully rinsed so that anything clinging to the outside of the cells would be washed off. It turned out that only radioactive phosphorus was present inside the cell. There was *no radioactive sulfur* to be detected inside.

That meant that the protein capsule of the virus, which included radioactive sulfur atoms in its structure, could not be

FREE: 21st ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

The subscription coupon on the next page will bring you a free copy of our October 1970, 21st Anniversary issue, which is fast becoming a collector's item. It includes stories by Zenna Henderson, Robin Scott Wilson, Avram Davidson, Barry Malzberg, Miriam Allen DeFord, Piers Anthony and Larry Niven. You may use the coupon to enter a new subscription or to renew or extend your current one. The coupon is backed by this copy, and removal does not affect the text of the surrounding story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inside the cell. It might help provide entry for the virus through enzyme action, but after that was done, *only the nucleic acid part of the virus entered the cell.*

Within the cell the virus nucleic acid brought about the production of more nucleic acid molecules like itself, imposing its own directions on the cell and making use of the cell's own enzymatic machinery for its purposes. Not only did it make more nucleic acid molecules like itself, but it also supervised the production of its own specific protein molecules to make new capsules for itself, at the expense of the cell's own needs. Eventually, the bacterial cell was destroyed, and where one bacteriophage entered, some two hundred were in existence, each ready to invade a new cell.

It must be the nucleic acid, then, that is the truly living part of the virus—and therefore of all creatures, including ourselves.

Furthermore, while ordinary microorganisms were free-living cells, which could, in some cases, invade and parasitize large organisms made up of numerous cells; viruses were something still more basic. They might be compared to free-living chromosomes capable of invading and parasitizing cells containing numerous chromosomes.

Avery was 67 years old at the time his revolutionary paper was published; and was near the end of his distinguished career in medical research—but not so near that there was no time to appreciate him. He did not die till 1955, eleven years later, and by that time, the nucleic acid triumph was clear and unmistakeable, and Avery's finding was clearly the beginning of that triumph.

Yet Avery never got a Nobel Prize, and by the clear estimate of both myself and the computer, that was a miscarriage of scientific justice.

Mercury Press, Inc., Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753
Enter my subscription to F&SF, and rush me a free copy of the 21st anniversary issue. I enclose ☐ $8.50 for one year; ☐ $21.00 for three years.
Please print 4-3
Name .....
Address .....
City ..... State ..... Zip .....
Add 50¢ per year for Canada and Mexico; $1.00 for other foreign countries

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I don't like the looks of your face, Mac!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The future of sf will be largely determined by whether there are enough talented, young writers attracted to the genre. One of the bright lights here is George Alec Effinger. Since our publication of "A Free Pass To the Carnival" (May 1971), Mr. Effinger has built up a solid body of quality work, including a novel, WHAT ENTROPY MEANS TO ME (Doubleday) and another forthcoming from Harper & Row. You'll be seeing more from Mr. Effinger in F&SF, but now consider this strange and beautifully told story of . . .

The City On The Sand

by GEO. ALEC EFFINGER

IN EUROPE, THERE WERE only memories of great cultures. Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, England, Carbba, and Germany had all seized control of the world's course and the imagination of the human race at one time or another. But now these great powers of the past were drifting into a cynical old age, where decadence and momentary pleasures replaced the drive for dominance and national superiority. In Asia, the situation was even worse. The Russias struggled pettily among themselves, expending the last energies of a once-proud nation in puerile bickerings. China showed signs of total degeneration, having lost its immensely rich heritage of art and philosophy while clinging to a ruthless creed that crushed its hopeless people beneath a burden of mock-patriotism. Breulandy was the only vibrant force east of the Caucasus Mountains; still, no observer could tell what that guarded land might do. Perhaps a Breulen storm would spill out across the continent, at least instilling a new life force in the decaying states. But from Breulandy itself came no word, no hint, as though the country had bypassed its time of ascendancy to settle for a weary and bitter mediocrity.

Of the rest of the world there was nothing to be said. The Americas still rested as they had in the few centuries since their discovery:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

huge parklike land masses, populated by savages, too distant, too worthless, too impractical to bother about. None of the crumbling European governments could summon either the leadership or the financial support to exploit the New World. The Skandinavian lands were inhabited by skin-clad brutes scarcely more civilized than the American cannibals. Further east, beyond the teeming Chinese shores, between Asia and the unexplored western reaches of the Americas, no one was quite certain just what existed and what was only myth. Perhaps the island continent of Lemarry waited with its untold riches and beautiful copper spires.

And then, lastly, there was Africa. One city sat alone on its fiery sands. One city, filled with refugees and a strange mongrel population, guarded that massive continent. Beyond that single city, built in some forgotten age by an unknown people for unimaginable purposes, beyond the high wooden gates that shut in the crazy heat and locked in the citizens, there was only death. Without water, the continent was death. Without shade, the parching *sharaq* winds were death. Without human habitation, the vast three thousand miles of whispering sands were death for anyone mad enough to venture across them. Only in the city was there a hollow travesty of life.

Ernst Weinraub sat at a table on the patio of the *Cafe de le Fee Blanche.* A light rain fell on him, but he did not seem to notice. He sipped his anisette, regretting that the proprietor had served it to him in such an ugly tumbler. The liqueur suffered. M. Gargotier often made such disconcerting lapses, but today especially Ernst needed all the delicacy, all the refinement that he could buy to hold off his growing melancholy. Perhaps the *Fee Blanche* had been a mistake. It was early, lacking some thirty minutes of noon, and if it seemed to him that his flood of tears was rising too quickly he could move on. To the *Respirette* or the *Cecil.* But as yet there was no need to hurry.

The raindrops fell heavily, spatting on the small metal table. Ernst turned in his chair, looking for M. Gargotier. Was the man going to let his customer get drenched? The proprietor had disappeared into the black interior of his establishment; Ernst thought of lowering the striped canopy himself,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but the shopkeeper image of himself that the idea brought to mind was too absurd. Instead he closed his eyes and listened to the water. There was music when the drops hit the furnishings on the patio. There was a duller sound when the rain struck the pavement. Then, more frequently, there was the irritating noise of the drops hitting his forehead. Ernst opened his eyes; his newspaper was a sodden mess and the puddle on his table was about to overflow into his lap.

There were not more than twenty small tables on the *Fee Blanche's* patio. Ernst was the only patron, as he was every day until lunchtime. He and M. Gargotier had become close friends. At least, so Ernst believed. It was so comforting to have a place where one could sit and watch, where the management didn't eternally trouble about another drink or more coffee. *Bien sur*, the old man never sat with Ernst to observe the city's idlers or offer to test Ernst's skill at chess. In fact, to be truthful, M. Gargotier had rarely addressed a full sentence to him. But Ernst was an habitue, M. Gargotier's only regular customer, and for quite different reasons they both hoped the *Fee Blanche* might become a favorite meeting place for the city's literate and wealthy few. Ernst had invested too many months of sitting at that same table to move elsewhere now.

This morning Ernst was playing the bored expatriate. He smoked only imported cigarettes, his boxed filters conspicuous among the packs of *Impers* and *Les Bourdes*. He studied the strollers closely, staring with affected weariness into the eyes of the younger women, refusing to look away. He scribbled on the backs of envelopes that he found in his coat pockets or on scraps of paper from the ground. He waited for someone to show some interest and ask him what he did. "I am just jotting notes for the novel," he would say, or, "Merely a sketch, a small poem. Nothing important. A transient joy mingled with regret." He watched the hotel across the square with a carefully sensitive expression, as if the view were really from the wind-swept cliffs of the English shore or the history-burdened martial plains of France. Anyone could see that he was an artist. Ernst promised fascinating stories and secret romantic insights,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but somehow the passers-by missed it all.

Only visions of the rewards for success kept him at M. Gargotier's table. Several months previously a poet named Courane had been discovered while sitting at the wicker bar of the *Cafe En Esquitand.* Since then Courane had become the favorite of the city's idle elite. Already he had purchased his own café and held court in its several dank rooms. Stories circulated about Courane and his admirers; exciting, licentious rumors grew up around the young man, and Ernst was envious. Ernst had lived in the city much longer than Courane. He had even read some of Courane's alleged poetry, and he thought it was terrible. But Courane's excesses were notorious; it was this that no doubt had recommended him to the city's weary nobility.

Something about the city attracted the failed poets of the world. Like the excavation of Troy, which discovered layer upon layer, settlement built upon ancient settlement, the recent history of the civilized world might be read in the bitter eyes of the lonely men waiting in the city's countless cafés. Only rarely could Ernst spare the time to visit with his fellows, and then the men just stared silently past each other. They all understood; it was a horrible thing for Ernst to know that they all knew everything about him. So he sat in the *Fee Blanche,* hiding from them, hoping for luck.

Ernst's city sat like a blister on the fringe of a great equatorial desert. The metropolitan centers of the more sophisticated nations were much too far away to allow Ernst to feel completely at ease. He built for himself a life in exile, pretending that it made no difference. But the provinciality of these people! The mountains and the narrow, fertile plain that separated the city from the northern sea effectively divided him from every familiar landmark of his past. He could only think and remember. And who was there to decide if his recollections might have blurred and altered with repetition?

The city was an oven, a prison, an asylum, a veritable zoo of human aberration. Perhaps this worked in Ernst's favor; those people who did not have to hire themselves and their children for food spent their empty hours searching for diversion.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The laws of probability suggested that it was likely that someday one of the patricians would offer a word to Ernst. That was all that he would need. He had the scene carefully rehearsed; he, too, had nothing else to do.

The anisette in the tumbler was finished. Ernst hit the table with the cup and held it above his head. He did not look around; he supported his aching head with his other hand and waited. M. Gargotier came and took the tumbler from him. The rain fell harder. Ernst's hair was soaked and tiny rivulets ran down his forehead and into his eyes. The proprietor returned with the tumbler filled. Ernst wanted to think seriously, but his head hurt too much. He had devised a neat argument against the traditional contrast of city and arcadian life in literature. Shakespeare had used it to great effect: the regulated behavior of his characters in town opposed to their irrational, comedic entanglements outside the city's gates. Somehow the present circumstance destroyed those myths; somehow Ernst knew that he didn't *want* them destroyed, and he had his headache and the everlasting morning rain to preserve them another day.

As the clock moved on toward midday, the rain stopped. Ernst leaned back in his chair and waited for the sun to draw pedestrians from their shelters. He signaled to M. Gargotier, and the proprietor brought a rag from the bar to mop the table. Ernst left his seat to check his appearance in the *Fee Blanche's* huge, cracked mirror. His clothes were still soaked, of course, and in the sudden afternoon heat they clung to him unpleasantly. He ran his hand through his hair, trying to give it a more raffish, rumpled look, but it was far too wet. M. Gargotier returned to his place behind the bar, ignoring Ernst. There were voices from the patio; Ernst sighed and gave up the bar's muggy darkness.

Outside, the sun made Ernst squint. His headache began to throb angrily. He went back to his usual table, noticing the crowd that had collected beyond the café's rusty iron railing. A few people had come into the *Fee Blanche*, preferring no doubt to witness the unknown spectacle from a more comfortable vantage. It was nearly time for Ernst to change to *mashroub rawhy*, his afternoon refreshment, but M. Gargotier was busily serving the newcomers. Ernst

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

waited impatiently, his tumbler of anisette once again empty. He stared at the backs of the people lining the sidewalk, unable for the moment to guess what had attracted them.

In a while Ernst heard a ragged ruffle of drums, and a high-pitched voice shouting orders. Only the *Gaish*, thought Ernst with disappointment. It was only the new Citizens' Army; there would be little chance here to advance his position. He did not care for the local folk and their sudden and silly politics, and his own sort of people would not be long entertained by the fools' parade. He called M. Gargotier in a loud, rude voice. "Bring me some of that ugly Arab drink," he said. "It's noon, isn't it?" There was not a word from the proprietor, not a smile or a nod.

So the time passed with Ernst trying mightily to ignore the exhibition in the street. Often the movements of the crowd opened spaces and he could see the garishly outfitted militia. The workmen and slaves of the city cheered them, and this made Ernst even more cheerless. He swallowed some of the local liquor in a gulp, holding the small wooden bowl on the flat of one palm. What good is that army? he wondered. The *Gaish* had no weapons. An army of no threats. And, beyond that, thought Ernst as he waved once more to M. Gargotier, they have no enemies. There is nothing on all of this damned sand but this single city. Just bread and circuses, he thought, observing the crowd's excitement. Just an entertainment for the groundlings.

Ernst had been in the *Fee Blanche* all morning and no one, not even the most casual early strollers, had paused to wish him a good day. Should he move on? Gather "material" in another café, have a sordid experience in a disorderly house, get beaten up by a jealous *gavroche?*

"So, *akkei* Weinraub! You sit out under all skies, eh?"

Ernst started, blinking and rapidly trying to recover his tattered image. "Yes, Ieneth, you must if you want to be an artist. What is climate, to interfere with the creative process?"

The girl was young, perhaps not as old as seventeen. She was one of the city's very poor, gaunt with years of hunger and dressed in foul old clothes. But she was not a slave—she would have looked better if she had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been. She earned a trivial living as a lens grinder. Behind her she pulled a two-wheeled cart, dilapidated and peeling, filled with pieces of equipment and tools. "How does it go?" she asked.

"Badly," admitted Ernst, smiling sadly and pulling a soggy bit of scrap paper from his pocket. "My poem of yesterday lies still unfinished."

The girl laughed. "*Chi ama assai, parla poco,*" she said. "You spend too much time chasing the pretty ones, no? You do not fool me, *akkei*, sitting there with your solemn long face. Your poem will have to be finished while you catch your breath, and then off after another of my city's sweet daughters."

A sudden cry from the crowd on the sidewalk prevented Ernst's reply. He shook his head in disgust. Ieneth interpreted his expression correctly, looking over her shoulder for a few seconds. She turned back to him, leaning on the railing near his table. He, of course, could not invite her to join him. There were only two classes of people in the city, besides the slaves: the wealthy and those like Ieneth. She was forbidden by custom to intrude on her betters, and Ernst was certainly not the crusading sort to sweep aside the laws of delicacy. Anyway, he thought, her people had their own dives, and he surely wouldn't be made welcome in them.

"You should see the larger story," said Ieneth. "As long as they spend their time marching and carrying broom rifles, you will have no competition for the company of their mothers and daughters."

"You mistake me," said Ernst, "though you flatter me unduly. Surely it is hopeless for such a one as I, with such, ah, cosmopolitan tastes."

"I would not agree," she whispered. Ernst became aware that he had been staring at her. She reached across the railing and touched him confidentially on the shoulder. The motion exposed her wonderful breasts completely.

Ernst took a deep breath, forcing himself to look into her eyes. "Do you know what I mean, then?"

"Certainly," she said, with an amused smile. She indicated her little wagon, "There are other sorts of grinders about, and anyone may have a lucrative avocation, no?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"When I was young, there was an old man who ground scissors and sharpened knives. He had a cart very much like your own."

"There, you see? I am of the acquaintance of a—what shall I say?—an organ grinder."

"I don't understand."

Ieneth shook her head, laughing at his obtuseness. She motioned for him to come closer. He slid his chair nearer to the railing. She touched his arm at the elbow, trailing her fingers down his sleeve, across his hip, and, most lightly of all, over the bunched material at his crotch. "I will meet you here in an hour?" she asked softly.

Ernst's throat was suddenly dry. "I will be here," he said.

In the time it took for Ernst to drink two more bowls of the warm brown Arabic beer the parade had ended. The crowd broke up, shouting new slogans which Ernst could not understand. The other patrons finished their drinks and departed, and the café was again empty except for its single poet. The sun had marked noon, and now, hotter still, moved down the sky just enough to hurt his eyes as he looked westward, across the street.

Ernst watched the clock on the hotel impatiently. The pedestrians moved by in their aimless courses, and each ticked off a few seconds on the yellow clock face. But the traffic could not beguile Ernst's furious expectation and was too sluggish to move the clock's iron hands quickly enough.

It was while Ernst was silent in thought, staring at the damned clock, lost in his own strange anticipatory horror, that someone moved a chair to his table and joined him. He looked up, startled. The stranger was a tall, thin Polish man named Czerny, a wealthy man who had come to the city a political refugee and who had made his fortune by teaching the city's hungry inhabitants to require the luxuries of Europe. Ernst had been introduced to Czerny a few times, but neither had been overly taken with the other's company.

"Good afternoon, Monsieur Weintraub," said Czerny. "Although there are a number of tables free, I have preferred to join you. I hope you will forgive my rather forward behavior."

Ernst waved away the apology, more curious about Czerny's motives. He did

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

realize that the blond man was the founder of the *Gaish*, the Citizens' Army, and its principal financial support. His appearance after its show was not mere happy chance.

"I'd like to speak with you for a moment, if I may, M. Weintraub," said Czerny.

"That's Weinraub, without the *t*. Certainly. Would you care for a drink?"

Czerny smiled his commercial smile. "No, thank you. This new religion of mine doesn't allow it. But look, M. Weinraub, I wonder if you realize the service you could render, in the time you spend idly here?"

Ernst was slightly annoyed. Surely Czerny wanted something, and his patronizing attitude wasn't going to help him get it. "What service do you mean, Monsieur Czerny? I doubt if I have anything that you might envy?"

"It is your talent. As you know, the *Gaish* is still small in numbers, even smaller in resources. I have been doing my limited best to help, but for our purposes even all my savings would be too little."

Ernst finished half a bowl of the liquor in one swallow. He raised his hand for M. Gargotier. "What are these purposes?" he asked.

"Why, liberty for all, of course," said Czerny, disappointed that Ernst had need to ask. "We distribute leaflets at all parades. Surely you've seen them."

"Yes," said Ernst, "but not read them."

"Ah. Well. Perhaps if they were composed in better style. . . ."

"Might I ask who has the task now?"

"A young man of great promise," said Czerny proudly. "Sandor Courane."

Ernst leaned back, lifting the front two legs of his chair off the pavement. "M. Czerny," he said slowly, "that is very interesting, but I must embarrassedly admit that you have chosen an inopportune time for this interview. This afternoon I have something of an assignation, and so. . . ." Ernst settled his chair, smiled drunkenly, and shrugged.

Czerny looked angry. He rose from his seat. "M. Weintraub, I will return later. I believe it is time that you considered such matters as duty and honor. Perhaps this evening you will be more of a mind to discuss this thing. Good day, and have a gratifying. . .assignation."

"Weinraub," whispered Ernst, as Czerny strode away. "Without the *t*."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Only a few minutes later he saw the girl Ieneth approaching, without her lens-grinding equipment. With her was another girl, taller and darker. Ernst rose from his chair by the railing, and the two girls joined him at his table. M. Gargotier, evidently expecting that Ernst would soon depart, did not come to take an order; he stood glaring in the bar's doorway, obviously resenting the presence of the two lower-class women. Ernst made a flamboyant gesture to summon the proprietor. He switched his drinking to absinthe, and the girls ordered wine.

"What is her name, Ieneth?" he asked, staring at the new girl. She looked shyly at the table.

"She is called Ua. In her language it means 'flower.' She does not understand our speech."

"How lovely her name, and how charming she is. Truly a flower. Convey to her my sincerest compliments." Ieneth did so. "What language is that?" asked Ernst.

"It is a strange dialect, spoken by the black people beyond the desert and the mountains. It is called Swahili."

"Black people? How interesting. I have only heard stories. They actually exist?"

"Yes, *akkei*," said Ieneth.

"And how did she learn the tongue? And you, also, for that matter?" Ieneth closed her eyes, fluttering her painted lashes, and smiled.

Ernst turned to Ua. "What is this called?" he said, pointing to her foot. Ieneth translated, and Ua replied.

"*Mguu*," she said.

"And this?" said Ernst, pointing now to her ankle.

"*Kifundo cha mguu.*"

"What is this?"

"*Jicho.*" Eye.

"How do you say 'mouth'?"

"*Kinywa.*"

Ernst sipped his drink nervously, although he labored to seem casual and urbane. "This?" he asked.

"*Mkono.*" Arm.

"This?" Ernst's fingers lingered on her breast, feeling the rough material of the brassiere beneath the cotton blouse.

Ua blushed. "*Kifua*," she whispered.

"She is indeed very lovely," Ernst said.

"And worthy of reward for her, ah, agent?" asked Ieneth.

"Certainly," said Ernst absently, as he moved his hand down past Ua's stomach, stopping at the seductive curve of her pudendum.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now, my love, what could this be?"

Ua said nothing, staring at the table. She blushed fiercely while she played with the base of her wineglass.

"Ask her what the word for this is," he said. Ieneth did so.

"*Mkunga*," Ua said at last, removing Ernst's hand.

Ieneth laughed shrilly, clapping her hands. Tears ran down her cheeks as she rose from her seat. "Ah, the 'cosmopolitan tastes'!" she said.

"What is so amusing?" asked Ernst.

"'*Mkunga*'!" said Ieneth. '*Mkunga*' is the word for 'eel.' Oh, enjoy your hour, *akkei*! You and 'she' will have much to discuss!" And she went out of the cafe, laughing as she walked away from Ernst's disconcerted and savage glare.

It was late afternoon, and already the sun was melting behind the hotel across the street. Ernst sipped wine now, for he appreciated the effect of the slanting sun's rays on the rich, dark liquid. He had discovered this by accident when he had first come to the city, strolling along the single, huge avenue. He had seen the red shimmers reflecting on the impassive face of a shopworn *gourgandine*. How much better, he had thought then, how much better it would be to have that singular fortunate play of light grace a true poet.

He sipped his wine and stared at the smudged handwriting on a scrap of paper: an *ebauche* of his trilogy of novels. He had done the rough outline so long ago that he had forgotten its point. But he was certain that the wine waves shifted to good effect on the yellowed paper, too.

Ernst took his short, fat pencil and wrote in the narrow spaces left to him on the scrap. "My scalp itches," he wrote. "When I scratch it I break open half-healed sores. I have a headache; behind my right eye my brain throbs. My ears are blocked, and the canals are swollen deep inside, as though large pegs had been hammered into them. My nostrils drip constantly, and the front of my face feels like it is filled with sand. My gums bleed, and my teeth communicate with stabbing pains. My tongue is still burned from the morning tea. My throat is dry and sore." This catalogue continued down the margins of the paper, and down his body,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to end with, "My arches cramp up at regular intervals, whenever I think about them. My toes are cut and painful on the bottom and fungused and itching between. And now I believe that it pains me to piss. But this last sympton bears watching; it is not confirmed."

On a napkin ringed with stains of chocolate and coffee Ernst began another list, parallel to the first. "The very continents shudder with the fever chills of war. Europe, my first home so far away, cringes in the dark sickroom between the sea and the Urals. Asia teeters into the false adolescence of senility, and is the more dangerous for it. Breulandy rises in the north and east, and who can tell of her goals and motives? South of the city Africa slumbers, unpopulated and sterile, under the cauterizing sun. The Americas? Far too large to colonize, to control, to aid us now.

"Oh, and whom do I mean by 'us'? The world is fractured so that we no longer know anything but *self*. My self finds symptoms everywhere, a political hypochondriac in exile. Perhaps if I were still in the numbing academic life of old, I would see none of this; *otio sepoltura dell'uomo vivo* —'inactivity is the tomb of the vital man.' I have time to make lists, now."

Of course he found sad significance in the two inventories when they were completed. He shook his head sorrowfully and stared meditatively at his wineglass, but no one noticed.

"Good evening, M. Weinraub." It was Czerny, still dressed in his gray uniform of the Citizens' Army. Ernst saw that the tunic was without decoration or indication of rank. Perhaps the *Gaish* was still so small that the men had only two or three officers in the whole organization. And here was the man again, to convince him that the whole situation was not foolish, after all.

"You are a man of your word, M. Czerny," said Ernst. "Will you join me again? Have a drink?"

"No, I'll pass that up," said Czerny as he seated himself at Ernst's table. "I trust your appointment concluded satisfactorily?"

Ernst grunted. It became evident that he would say nothing more. Czerny cursed softly. "Look," he said, "I don't want to have to go through all these stupid contests of yours. This isn't a kind of amusement any long-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

er. You're going to have to choose sides. If you're not with us, you're against us."

Ernst was amused by the man's grave talk. He couldn't understand the urgency at all. "Who are you going to fight? I don't see it. Maybe if you paid them enough, you could hire some Arabs. But it's still a good distance to ask them to ride just for a battle. Or maybe if you split your tiny bunch in half, one part could start a civil uprising and the other part could put it down. But I really just want to watch."

"Damn it, you *are* an idiot! I'm not asking you to be a dirty *goundi.* We can get plenty of infantry by just putting up notices. If we could afford to pay them. If we could afford the notices. But intelligence is at a premium in this city. We need you and the others like you. I promise you, you'll never have to carry a rifle or face one. But you have to be man enough to cast your lot with us, or we'll sweep you aside with the rest of the old ways."

"Rhetoric, Czerny, rhetoric!" said Ernst, giggling. "I came here to get away from all that. Leave me alone, will you? I sit here and get drunk. I don't mess with *you* while you play soldiers. I'm not any more useful than you, but at least I don't bother anybody."

Czerny banged the little table with his fist. The table's metal top flipped off its three legs, dumping Ernst's wineglass to the ground. Czerny didn't appear to notice. He talked on through the crashing of the table and the breaking of the glass. "Useful! You want to talk about useful? Have you ever read anything about politics? Economics? You know what keeps a culture alive?"

"Yes," said Ernst sullenly, while M. Gargotier cleaned up the mess. "People not bothering other people."

"A good war every generation or so," said Czerny, ignoring Ernst, seeing him now as an enemy. "We've got authorities. Machiavelli, he said that the first cause of unrest in a nation is idleness and peace. That's all this city has ever known, and you can see the results out there." Czerny waved in the direction of the street. All that Ernst could see was a young woman in a short leather skirt, naked from the waist up. She met his glance and waved.

"I hadn't realized your thing had gotten this involved," said Ernst. "I really

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thought you fellows were just showing off. But it's a whole lot worse than that. Well, I won't disturb you, if that's what you're worried about."

"We want you to join us."

Ernst smiled sadly, looking down at his new glass of wine. "I'm sorry," he said. "I don't make decisions any more."

Czerny stood up. He kicked a shard of the broken wineglass into the street. "You're wrong," he said. "You've just made a very bad one."

Night crept westward, sweeping more of Africa under her terrible cloak. The poor of the city happily gave up their occupations and hurried to their homes to join their families for the evening meal. The wealthy few considered the entertainments and made their choices. Along the city's only avenue shops closed up and gated shutters were locked over display windows. The marketing noises stilled, until Ernst could hear the bugle calls and shouted orders of the *Gaish* as they drilled on the plain before the city's northern gate. The day's liquor had had its desired effect, and so the noises failed even to remind Ernst of Czerny's anger.

The city was certainly one of immigrants, Ernst thought. As he had escaped from a crazy Europe, so had Czerny. So had Sandor Courane. Ieneth and her false flower, Ua, had fled from some mysterious wild empire. Could it be that every person sheltered within the city's granite walls had been born elsewhere? No, of course not; there must be a large native population. These must be the ones most stirred by the absurd wrath of the *Gaish*, for who else had enough interest? Ernst lived in the city only because he had nowhere else to go. He had stopped briefly in Gelnhausen and the nearby village of Frachtdorf. From Bremen he had sailed to the primitive Skandinavian settlements that bordered the northern sea. He had resided for short times in England and France, but those nations' murderous nationalism made him run once more. Each time he settled down, it was in a less comfortable situation. Here on the very lip of Africa, the city was the final hope of those who truly needed to hide.

The city held many sorts of wonderful things, nonetheless, things rare in Europe

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and prized by the slaves and the poor. There was a large colony of artists, and their pottery and sculpture was famous all over the world, though not so much so that it attracted either tourists or trade. At this time of day the craftsmen of the city would be heading for the bars with their day's earnings, eager for the less tangible beauties of wine and poetry. Ernst was bored by clay pots, and he had little enough of his own art to trade.

Dusk settled in on the shoulders of the city. Ernst sat at his table with his bits of paper and his little supper of cheese and apples. Around him the city prepared for night, but he didn't care. Customarily each evening after dinner he declared the day productive; arriving at this point, he ordered bourbon and water.

Following the avenue to the north, the strollers that he watched would reach the amusement quarter, where replicas of familiar scenes from other lands dug at their buried homesickness. Ernst could see the brightly colored strings of lights go on, shining through the gaps between trees and buildings, diffused by mist and distance.

A canal ran parallel to the avenue outside the city proper. On its northern bank were restaurants, bars, and casinos. Women danced naked in all of them. Diamonds were sold by old men in tents, and every building had a few young whores in the front window. There were areas set aside for dozens of different sports: boccie, tennis, and miniature golf facilities were the most popular. Everything prohibited from sale within the city was available here: fine leather goods, lace, gold and silverware, expensive woods made into furniture, alone or in combination with steel or plastic, perfumes, silks, rugs, every sort of luxury.

Floodlights went on, illuminating models of the ruins of Rome and of Athens. The replica of the Schloss Bruhl opened its gates, complete with exact representations of the ceiling painting by Nicholas Stuber, and the furnishings in white and gold of the dining room, music room, and state bedroom upstairs. The large marketplace of the city was lit by torches. Though containing little merchandise of value, it was famed for its bouillabaisse.

Ernst had never seen any of this, but he had heard

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stories. He preferred to spend his evenings dedicated to serious thinking.

Every quarter hour a clock tower chimed more of the night away. Sitting alone in the *Cafe de la Fee Blanche*, he could hear the distant carnival noises: sirens, the flat clanging of cheap metal bells, the music of small silver bells, shrill organ melodies, gunshots, voices singing, voices laughing. In the immediate area of the café, however, there were few people about, only those who had exhausted their money or their interest and were returning home. Occasionally the wind brought tenuous hints of strange smells and noises. Still, Ernst had no desire to discover what they might be. Over the years, his route to the city had been long, and these days he was tired.

There were few customers in the *Fee Blanche* after dark. Ernst did not mind; his nights were entrusted to solitude. He actually looked forward to night, when he ceased performing for the benefit of the passers-by. Now his only audience was himself. His thoughts grew confused, and he mistook that quality for complexity.

"Your passport, sir?" he whispered, remembering. By this time he was taking his bourbon straight.

"Yes, here it is," he answered himself. "I'm sure you'll find it all in order." He spoke in German, and the words sounded odd in the hot African night.

"You are Ernst Weinraub?"

"With a *t*. My name is Weintraub. A rather commonplace German name."

"Yes. So. Herr Weintraub. Please step over here. Have a seat."

"Is something wrong?"

"No, this is purely formality. It won't take a moment to clear it up."

Ernst recalled how he had taken a chair against the gray and green wall. The official disappeared for a short time. When he returned he was accompanied by another man. The two spoke quietly in their own language, and quickly enough so that Ernst understood little. He heard his name mentioned several times, each time mispronounced as "Weinraub."

Ernst stared at the hotel across the avenue. He took a long swallow of bourbon. Now the *Fee Blanche* was empty again except for himself and M. Gargotier, who sat listening to a large radio

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inside the dark cave of the bar. Ernst shook his head sadly. He had never gone through such a scene with immigration officials. He had never spelled his name with a *t*. Unless, perhaps, in his youth, when he. . . .

"Monsieur Weinraub! You're certainly dependable. Always here, eh? What an outpost you'd make." It was Czerny, his gray uniform soiled, his tunic hanging unbuttoned on his thin frame. He staggered drunkenly; he supported a drunken woman with the aid of another uniformed man. Ernst's own eyes were not clear, but he recognized Ieneth. He did not answer.

"Don't be so moody," said the woman. "You don't have any more secrets, do you, *akkei* Weinraub?"

Ernst looked at her as she swayed on the sidewalk. "No," he said. He took some more of his liquor and waved her away. She paid no attention.

"Here," said Czerny, "try some of this. From the amusement quarter. A little stand by the Pantheon. The man makes the best stuffed crab I've ever had. Do you know Lisbon? The Tavares has a name for stuffed crab. Our local man should steal that honor."

"Alfama," said Ernst.

"What is that?" asked Ieneth.

"Alfama," said Ernst. "Lisbon. The old quarter."

"Yes," said Czerny. They were all silent for a few seconds. "Oh, I'm sorry, M. Weinraub. You have the acquaintance of my companion, do you not?"

Ernst shook his head and raised his hand for M. Gargotier, forgetting that the proprietor had retired inside his bar and could not see.

"We have met before," said the stranger in the uniform of the *Gaish*. "Perhaps M. Weinraub does not recall the occasion. It was at a party at the home of Safety Director Chanzir."

Ernst smiled politely but said nothing. "Then may I present my friend?" said Czerny. "M. Weinraub, I am honored to introduce Colonel Sandor Courane."

Czerny grinned, waiting to see how Ernst would react. Courane reached over the railing to shake hands, but Ernst pretended not to see. "Ah, yes," he said, "forgive me for not recognizing you. You write verses, do you not?"

Czerny's grin vanished. "Do not be more of a fool, M. Weinraub. You see very little from your seat here,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you know. You cannot understand what we have done. Tonight the city is ours!"

Ernst drained the last drop of bourbon from his glass. "To whom did it belong previously?" he said softly.

"M. Weinraub," said Ieneth, "we've had some pleasant talks. I like you, you know. I don't want you to be hurt."

"How can I be hurt?" asked Ernst. "I'm carefully not taking sides. I'm not going to offend anyone."

"You offend *me*," said Czerny, beckoning to Ieneth and Courane. The woman and the two uniformed men tottered away down the sidewalk. Ernst got up and took his glass into the bar for more bourbon.

The short night passed. Ernst drank; his thoughts became more incoherent and his voice more strident, but there was no one at all to observe him. He sang to himself and thought sadly about the past, and though he gestured energetically to M. Gargotier, even that patient audience remained silent. Finally, driven further into his own solitude, he drew out his dangerous thoughts. He reviewed his life, as he did every night; he took each incident in order, or at least in the special order that this particular night demanded. The events of the day, considered with his customary drunken objectivity. A trivial today, he thought, a handful of smoke.

It was late. Even the bright lights of the amusement quarter had been turned off. The evening's celebrants had straggled back up the avenue, past the *Cafe de la Fee Blanche*, but now there was only Ernst and the nervous, sleepy proprietor. When was the last time Ernst had seen Gretchen? He recalled the characteristic thrill he got whenever he saw his wife's familiar shape, recognized her comfortable pace. What crime had he committed, that he was left to decay alone? Had he grown old? He examined the backs of his hands, the rough, yellowed skin, where the brown spots merged into a fog. He tried to focus on the knife ridges of tendon and vein. No, he decided, he wasn't old. It wasn't *that*.

He longed to see Steven, his son. It had been years; that, too, wasn't fair. Governments and powers would have their way, but certainly it wouldn't upset their dynas-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tic realms to allow the fulfilling of one man's sentiments. How old was the boy now? Old enough to have children of his own? Perhaps, amazingly, grandchildren for Ernst? Steven might have a son; he might be named Ernst, after his funny (old) grandfather.

He heard the rattling of M. Gargotier drawing the steel gate across the door and windows of the small café. The sound was loud and harsh, and it made Ernst feel peculiarly abandoned, as it did every night. Suddenly he was aware that he sat alone in a neglected city, a colony despised by the rest of the world, alone on the insane edge of Africa, and no one cared. He heard the click of a switch, and knew that the *Fee Blanche's* own sad strings of lights had been extinguished. He heard M. Gargotier's slow, heavy steps.

"M. Weinraub?" said the proprietor softly. "I will go now. It is nearly dawn. Everything is locked now. Maybe you should go, too, eh?" Ernst nodded, staring across the avenue. The proprietor made some meaningless grunt and hurried home, down the street.

The last of the bourbon went down Ernst's throat. Its abrupt end shocked him. So soon? He remembered M. Gargotier's last words, and tears formed in the corners of his eyes. He struggled to order his thoughts.

He wondered about his sanity for a moment. Perhaps the day's excitement, perhaps the liquor had introduced a painful madness to his recollections. He realized that he had never been married. Gretchen, again? Sometimes he thought of this unknown woman. Steven? Ernst's father's name had been Stefan. Gretchen, married? He called to M. Gargotier. "More bourbon, straight, no water," he said. There was still some darkness left. But he could already make out the lines of the hotel across the street, just beginning to edge into view from the mask of nighttime.

"I have never gone *anywhere*," he whispered. "I have never come from anywhere." He sat silently for a moment, his admission hanging in the hot morning air, echoing in his sorrowing mind. Will that do? he wondered. He looked in vain for M. Gargotier.

He could almost read the face of the clock across the street. He picked up his glass, but it was still empty. Angrily, he threw it at the clock. It crashed into pieces

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the middle of the avenue, startling a small flock of pigeons. So, it was morning; perhaps now he could go home. He rose from his cheap latticed chair. He could not move. He stood, wavering drunkenly. Wherever he turned it seemed to him that an invisible wall held him. His eyes grew misty. The wardens had locked his doors.

"No escape," he said, sobbing. "It's Courane that's done this. Courane and Czerny. He *said* they'd get me, the bastards, but not *now*. Please!" He could not move.

He sat again at the table. "They're the only ones with all the facts," he said, searching tiredly for M. Gargotier. He held his head in his hands. "It is for my own good. They know what they're doing."

His head bowed over the table. Soon he would be able to hear the morning sounds of the city's earliest risers. Soon the day's business would begin. Not so very long from now M. Gargotier would arrive, greet him cheerfully as he did every morning, roll back the steel shutters and bring out two fingers of anisette. Now, though, tears dropped from Ernst's eyes onto the table's rusting circular surface. They formed little convex puddles, and in the center of each reflected the last of the new morning's stars.

Coming next month

Featured next month will be THE ASUTRA, the concluding novel of Jack Vance's Durdane trilogy, which began here with THE FACELESS MAN (Feb. and March 1971) and continued with THE BRAVE FREE MEN (July and August 1972).

Please note: It is *not* necessary to have read the first two novels to enjoy and understand this final one. THE ASUTRA is a complete novel in itself, and for those who wish to be filled in on the overall picture, a synopsis will be provided.

However, if you wish to read the earlier novels, be advised that we have a *limited* quantity of the February and March 1971 and a larger quantity of the July and August 1972 issues available. Send $1.00 for each *issue* to: Mercury Press, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

F&SF Competition

REPORT ON COMPETITION 4

In the November issue we asked for openings of stories that could be included in THE YEAR'S WORST FANTASY AND SF. The response was overwhelming; we have boxes full of leads for stories that thankfully no one will ever have to finish. We've expanded this section by a page and only wish we had room to print more.

A note on word limits: We have not been fanatically rigid in eliminating entries that were slightly over 75 words, but it is necessary to stay close to the limit we set. For the future, compute word count by counting characters and dividing by 7.

FIRST PRIZE:

Oh, it was a *wonderful* school, Joyce-Ann thought happily as she hurried down the gentle flower-dappled slope toward the one-room building. Just perfect for a new teacher's first school, and a delicious opportunity to light the lamp of learning in this remote and isolated mountain community. There had been, to be sure, something odd and disquieting about the appearance and behavior of the school board, but after all, children were children everywhere.

—Bob Leman

SECOND PRIZE:

Lawrens taped his broken arm, watching his partner emerging from the wreck of the *Ares I.*

"Bad news," O'Brien reported crisply. "Only one oxygen tank survived the crash intact."

"That's not enough to last us until the rescue ship arrives!"

"O'Brien nodded. "For *two* men, no."

"Oh my God! You aren't suggesting—"

O'Brien's eyes gleamed as coldly as the Martian sky.

"I'm sure," said O'Brien, "we can settle this matter like rational, civilized human beings. . ."

—James E. Sutherland

RUNNERS UP:

This trip Mason had it figured out. He had backtracked 800 years to Madrical's stronghold continium. Inside the fortress he saw his previous self hidden behind the drapes watching a still previous self being tortured. Watching it now he remembered how THAT had hurt, as he felt the tender place where his testicles had been. Hearing a noise behind him he turned and saw his future self, #4 behind him preparing a force screen; but of course he didn't yet know what his future self was up to. Sure, he felt uneasy when he noticed that #4 was missing an eye and a leg, but. . .

—Dave Williams

The end had come rather quickly. Rickettsia No.3254860 spread swiftly, carried by the bloodthirsty gnats. One bite and the mind rotted, the body bloated, the bones crumbled. The earth was decimated within the week.

Conrad emerged from the hyperbaric oxygen chamber where he had been studying the life cycle of Strongyloides Stercoralis for two months.

Their footsteps echoed in the empty streets of Extol A&M campus. "Well, Ann," Conrad said, "I guess it's up to you and me to start things

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all over again." He softly stroked her silken hair.

Ann merely bleated.

—*Glenn Hunt*

Even at 50,000,000 miles the explosion was so violent that the crew blacked out. Afterward, to everyone's amazement, instruments showed that Earth was unharmed. But the Terran prisoner noticed that the ship's chronometer had lost an hour. Obviously the detonation had slammed them backward in time. Ergo, the bomb was not yet launched.

Nor would it be! The prisoner would crush these twittering human savages. Nothing could stop him. Not even being welded to the deck.

—*Colin G. Jameson*

The last man on Earth sat alone in a room. He was bored. He had been sitting there for several years, taking out time from his boredom only to eat. He had raided twenty-nine supermarkets for all their TV dinners and, having jerry-rigged a freezer system, he was able to keep alive without leaving the room. He had started out eating nothing but Swanson chicken pot pie TV dinners, but had moved on to Stouffer's gourmet dinners—braised beef tips with mashed potatoes, sukiyaki with little Oriental vegetables, Midwestern Family TV dinner with apple pan dowdy—and now found himself fond of Hickory Farms all-vegetable dinner, beef patty with home fries dinner, lamb and apple sauce dinner, scallops with tartar sauce dinner... He was bored.

—*Harlan Ellison*

"Great Planets, Billy! Quit recoating those stern tube vanes and hustle up here, pronto. The visiplate just announced that all ships entered in the Solar Sprint have to be at the rocket field in *ten minutes!*"

"OK, Uncle Steve," Billy yelled back. Heart beating wildly he dashed to the control room, and strapped himself into his grav-seat. "Will we make it?"

"Only one way to find out," his uncle replied. "Stand by to blast!"

—*James Sutherland*

Kvtnn was aware that he should *sprntrl;* custom, as well as the laws of *hlaag,* decreed that at the third juncture of Leeb and Gorn each Chrulet was required either to *sprntrl* or to give *Tilturs* to the Gods. But he could do neither without the consent of his *perns,* who now faced him across the *whimp:* Ktnnv, Vnntk, and his beloved Ntknv, all gently gnarling under the triple moons of Altair VI.

—*Bob Leman*

Oldgaard surveyed the landscape from his horse. It was The Time of the Midsummer Valkyrie during The Phase of the Light of the Silvery Moon in the fourth year after The Nuclear Plague. His hand rested easily on the hilt of the photon-sword.

He tensed, sensing something behind him. His golden mane flew as his horse, kicking snow, whirled about.

"By Loki!" he cursed aloud. "My blade shall taste barbarian blood on this day!"

—*Harold Stone*

"Completely human in appear-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ance, but without any stupid human emotionalism," the professor explained, demonstrating the beautiful mechanism he had created.

"Ko-ral, slap Captain Harris," he commanded.

WHAP!! A hard robot hand reddened the handsome spaceman's cheek.

"Ko-ral, *kiss* him."

Harris felt firm plasto-flesh lips mold themselves to his mouth.

"Enough!" the hard-eyed scientist instructed coldly. The robot stepped back from the spaceman with seeming reluctance, her face strangely flushed and her green eyes misty.

—*J. B. Bolton*

COMPETITION 5

For the next competition we ask you to submit—dare we? yes, onward—a FEGHOOT, in 150 words or less.

What is a Feghoot, you ask? How can we explain? Ferdinand Feghoot was the creation of one Grendel Briarton, and Feghoot's adventures through time and space appeared in this magazine for many years in the 50's and '60's. To quote the late Anthony Boucher: "A true Feghoot not only culminates in a pun of singular beauty and terror; it is, even before that point, an entertainingly absurd episode of a possible history."

And here, to spur you to the challenge, is a brand-new Feghoot:

THROUGH TIME AND SPACE WITH FERDINAND FEGHOOT

On the planet Greenthumb, the flowers of Earth not only burgeoned but mutated fantastically. In fifty years, they were mobile; in a hundred, intelligent. Soon they formed social structures like man's—marrying, having love affairs, raising their offspring, fighting their neighbors.

Finally, out of nowhere, a Leader appeared who threatened all institutions, human and vegetable.

Ferdinand Feghoot was asked to investigate and offer a remedy. Presently he reported: "Some years ago, an especially lovely young flower—indeed, she was Miss Greenthumb of 3887—was seduced by a handsome, unscrupulous male begonia, intrigued by the slight difference between his species and hers. She abandoned the unfortunate fruit of this union, who had to live by his wits, pilfering fertilizer, putting down roots wherever he could. He grew up embittered. Today, he swears he'll rule the whole planet as absolute dictator."

"What can we do?" cried people and flowers alike. "How can we stop him?"

"You cannot," said Ferdinand Feghoot. "Don't you see? This is no common conqueror—you cannot resist the Waif of the Fuchsia!"

GRENDEL BRIARTON

Rules: Send entries to Competition Editor, F&SF, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Entries must be received by May 1. Judges are the editors of F&SF; their decision is final. All entries become the property of F&SF; none can be returned.

Prizes: First prize, *The Early Asimov* (Doubleday, $10.00). Second prize, 20 different sf paperbacks. Runners-up will receive one-year subscription to F&SF. Results of Competition 5 will appear in the August issue.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantasy and Science Fiction

MARKET PLACE

BOOKS-MAGAZINES

SCIENTIFANTASY specialist: Books, magazines. Free catalog. Gerry de la Ree, 7 Cedarwood, Saddle River, N.J. 07458.

SPECIALISTS: Science Fiction, Fantasy, Weird Fiction. Books, Pocketbooks. Lists issued. Stephen's Book Service, Post Office Box 321, Kings Park, L.I., New York 11754.

SF-Fantasy magazines, books, paperbacks. List free. Collections also purchased. Robert Madle, 4406 Bestor Drive, Rockville, Md. 20853.

100 page catalog. Arkham. Fantasy, Burroughs, Mirage Press, Science Fiction Pulp, paperbacks, comics. Send 75¢. We also buy SF and comic collections. Send lists. Passaic Book Center, 594 Main Ave., Passaic, N.J. 07055.

FANTASY-SF books, detective fiction, Sherlockiana. Mostly hardcover first editions. Free catalogs. Aspen Bookhouse, RD 1, Freeville, N.Y. 13068.

SF-FANTASY books for sale. Lists. Gordon Barber, 35 Minneapolis Ave., Duluth, Mn 55803.

Send for Free catalogue of hardcover science fiction and fantasy books and pulps. Canford Book Corral, Box 216, Freeville, N.Y. 13068.

FANTASY & SCIENCE OF THE MIND mapped out in the applied philosophy of the book Dianetics: Modern Science of Mental Health by L. Ron Hubbard. Send $5.00 to Bookstore-FS, Founding Church of Scientology, 1812 19th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

For Sale: Science fiction, westerns, others. Wanted: Doc Savage, Shadow, others. We buy collections. Send list, enclosing stamp. Magazine Center, Box 214, Little Rock, Ark. 72203.

RUTHBELLA BELOVED—Beggar's Confessional—$2.00. Bookways, 436fs Center, Fort Lee, N.J. 07024.

"DINOSAUR!" Science fiction cassette-book (60 minutes). $2.50. Audilit, 1806 Brighton, Brubank, California 91506.

FREE CATALOGS SF/FANTASY 100's of titles listed from rarities to reading copies. MIDLAND BOOK SERVICE, 22 S. Fullerton Ave., Montclair, N.J. 07042.

WEIRDBOOK!—60,000 words (last three issues). $2.00; all six, $3.85—lithographed; *illustrated. Fantasy by* ROBERT E. HOWARD, DAVID R. BUNCH, other professional writers. Box 35, Amherst, N.Y. 14226.

"Jesse's Summing, II," $10.00, concerns religion, Shumway, 1503 Paulding Rd., Ft. Wayne, Ind. 46806.

By author of LAS DELICIAS a new book, GHOSTS OF ALAMOS. Available D. Chubbuck, 1113 Laird, Tempe, Ariz. 85281. Each $3 postpaid.

EDUCATION

Theological degrees, ordination. Extension Study. Chartered, accredited. Calvary Grace Christian Church, Kitchen Building, Ashland, Kentucky 41101.

Earn College degrees at home. Many subjects. Florida State Christian College, Post Office Box 1674, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 33302.

HYPNOTISM

LEARN WHILE ASLEEP. Hypnotize with your recorder, phonograph. Astonishing details, sensational catalog free. Sleep-learning Research Association, Box 24-FS, Olympia, Washington, 98502.

Hypnotism Revealed. Free Illustrated Details. Powers, 12015 Sherman Road, *North Hollywood, California 91605.*

FREE Hypnotism, Self-Hypnosis. Sleep learning Catalog! Drawer G-400, Ruidoso, New Mexico 88345.

INSTRUCTION

TELEPATHY COURSE—as successfully taught in classes by research scientist. Send $4.00 for first lesson to Dr. J. Burns, P.O. Box 11201-N, Honolulu, HA 96814.

MISCELLANEOUS

ANTIGRAVITY DEVICE. Brochure rushed free. AGD, Box 3062 xx, Bartlesville, Oklahoma 74003.

Do you have something to advertise to sf readers? Books, magazines, typewriters, telescopes, computers, space-drives, or misc. Use the F&SF Market Place at these low, low rates: $3.00 for minimum of ten (10) words, plus 30¢ for each additional word. Send copy and remittance to: Adv. Dept., Fantasy and Science Fiction, P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ESP LABORATORY. This new research service group can help you. For FREE information write: Al G. Manning, ESP Laboratory, 7559 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90046.

COSMIC WORKSHOP presents visual exploration, Fantasy, Sci-fi. . .#1 & 2 (32-36 pgs) 8½ x 11. Photo-offset. 50¢ each plus 25¢ postage. #12435, Gainesville, Fla. 32601.

FOREIGN EDITIONS OF Fantasy and Science Fiction. A few copies of French, German, Italian, Portuguese, British and Swedish editions available at $1.00 each; three for $2.00. Mercury Press, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753.

Noted ESP Specialist has given many accurate predictions on radio and TV. Has helped many people with personal problems. Three questions for $10.00 or 7 for $20.00. By mail Milton Kramer, 9100 N. Cumberland Ave., Niles, Illinois 60648, Phone (312) 298-4588.

Ivory and other handicrafts direct from Malabar coast. Airmail description to P.M. AbdulAzeez, Neeleeswaram P.O., via Kalady, Kerala, India.

Gold Panning in S.W. Canada. Placer gold can still be found in British Columbia. Confidential information $2.00 refundable. W. Conley, Distributor, 27-1121 Vancouver St., Victoria, B.C.

PERSONAL

WITCHCRAFT, VOODOO HEAD-QUARTERS. Spells Galore! Occult Correspondence Club. Catalog 25¢. Cauldron, Box 403-FSF, Rego Park, N.Y. 11374.

IN THE EVENT you should have any fear of answers do not reply! 5 questions and a 2 year personal analysis. THIS IS SOMETHING DIFFERENT! Send letter in your own handwriting on unlined paper. Give full birth name, birth date, year, month, date and $5.00 to: Tobie Moran, 920 Oak Terrace, Placerville, Calif. 95667.

YOUR MARKET PLACE

A market is people—alert, intelligent, active people.

Here you can reach 150,000 people (averaging three readers per copy—50,000 paid circulation). Many of them are enthusiastic hobbyists—collecting books, magazines, stamps, coins, model rockets, etc.—actively interested in photography, music, astronomy, painting, sculpture, electronics.

If you have a product or service of merit, tell them about it. The price is right: $3.00 for a minimum of ten (10) words, plus 30¢ for each additional word. To keep the rate this low, we must request remittance with the order.

Post office box and number count as two words. No charge for zip code.

Closing date is 20th of fourth preceding month; e.g., June issue, published May 1, closes Feb. 20.

Fantasy & Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

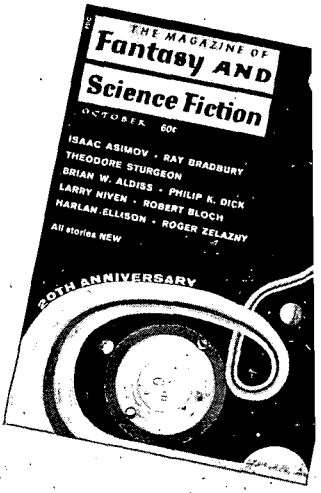
A MERCURY PUBLICATION

The Imprint of Quality

(since 1937)

THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy AND Science Fiction



F&SF's readers are both young (84% under 45) and educated (62% have attended college). When they want relaxation or stimulation in reading, they turn to the best works of imagination and to FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION. "F&SF regularly supplies the finest the field has to offer in the way of short fiction"—*Clifton Fadiman.* Compelling fiction, along with informative and stimulating features on *Books* (James Blish) and *Science* (Isaac Asimov), have earned F&SF its reputation as tops in the field.

Portuguese Edition

French Edition

German Edition

MERCURY PRESS, INC. • **347 East 53 Street, New York, N. Y. 10022**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED